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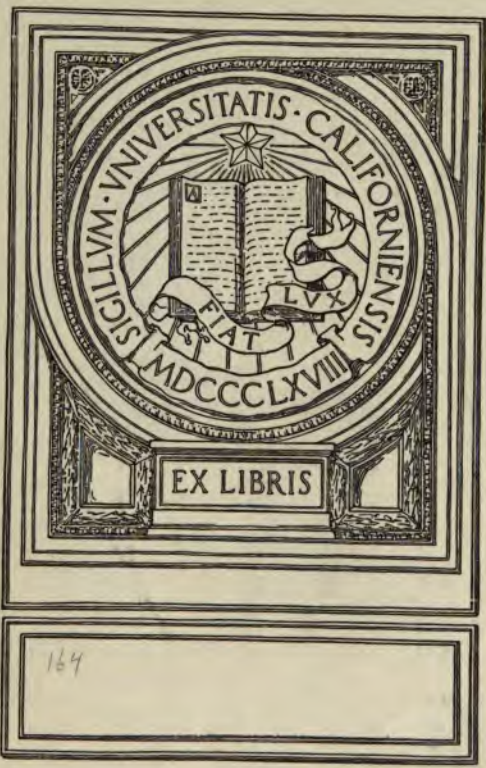
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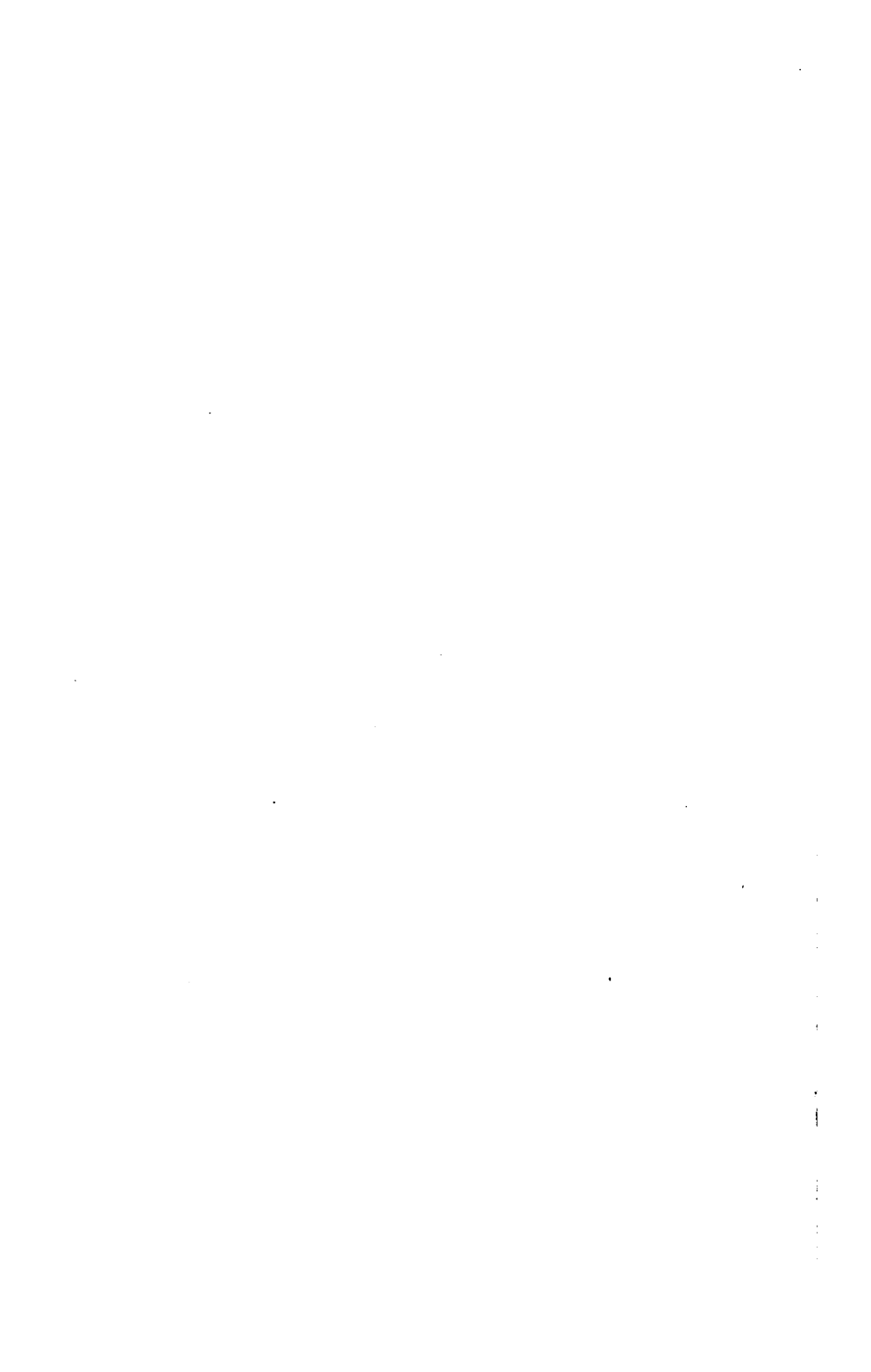
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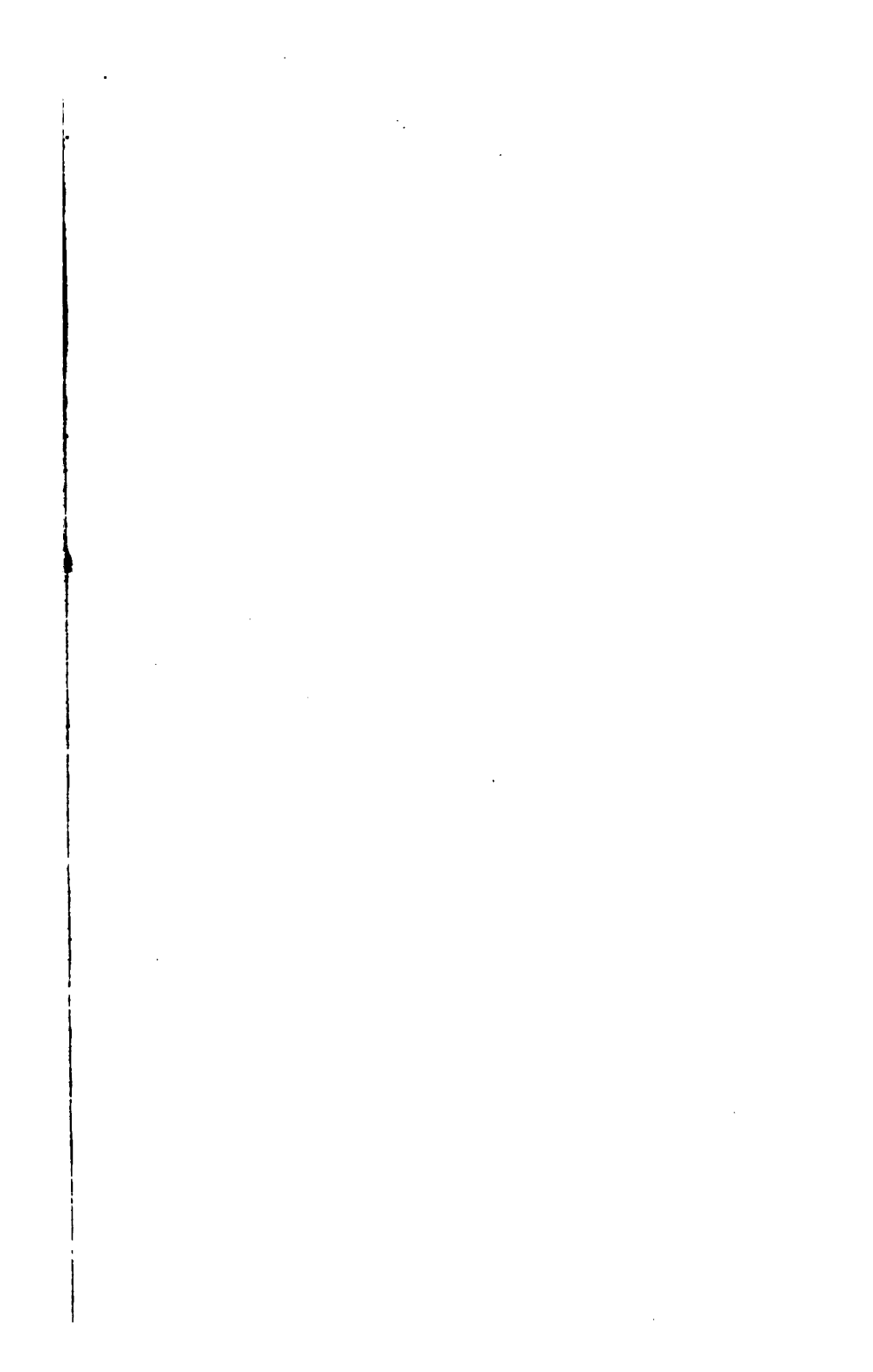
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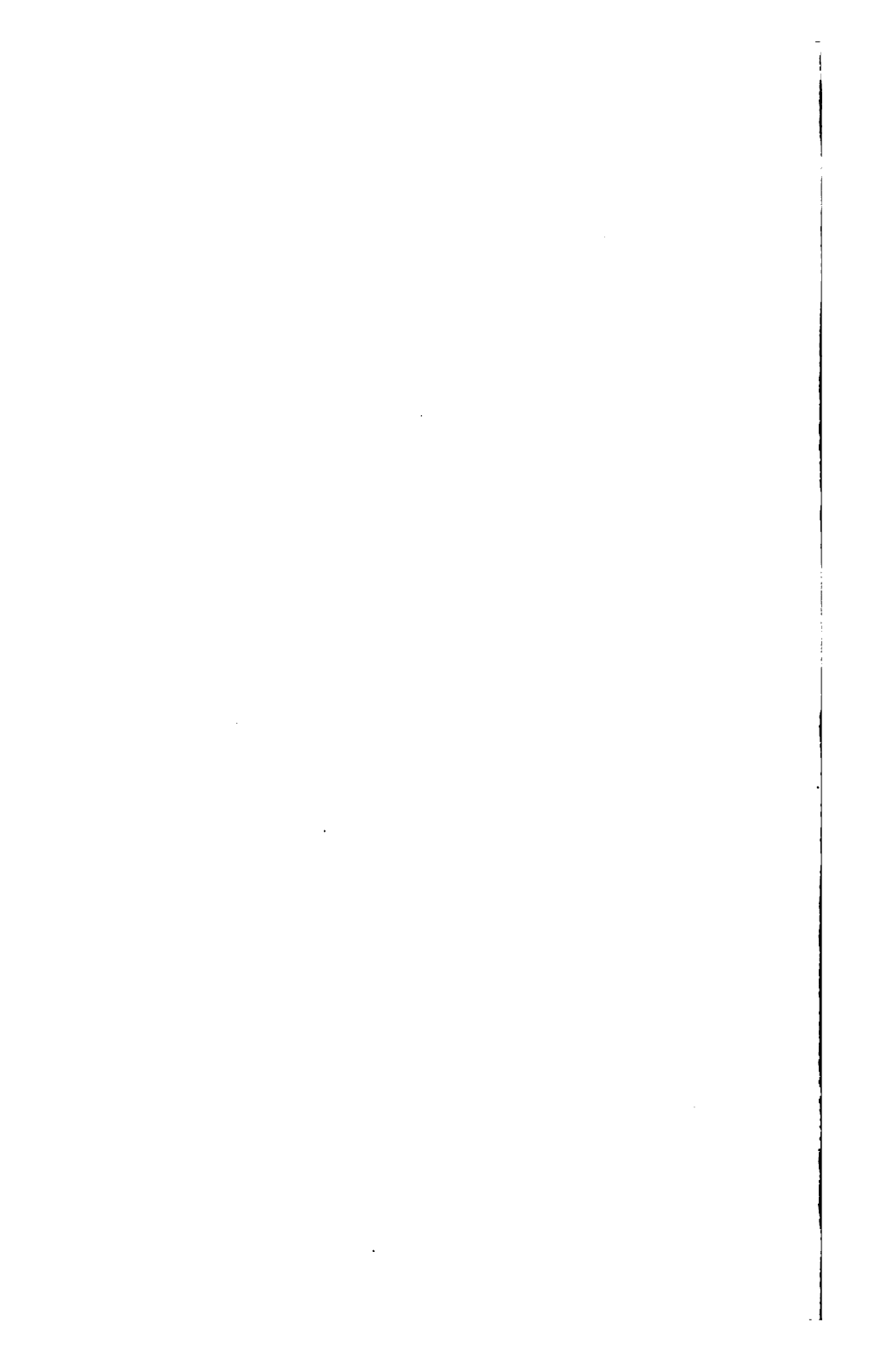


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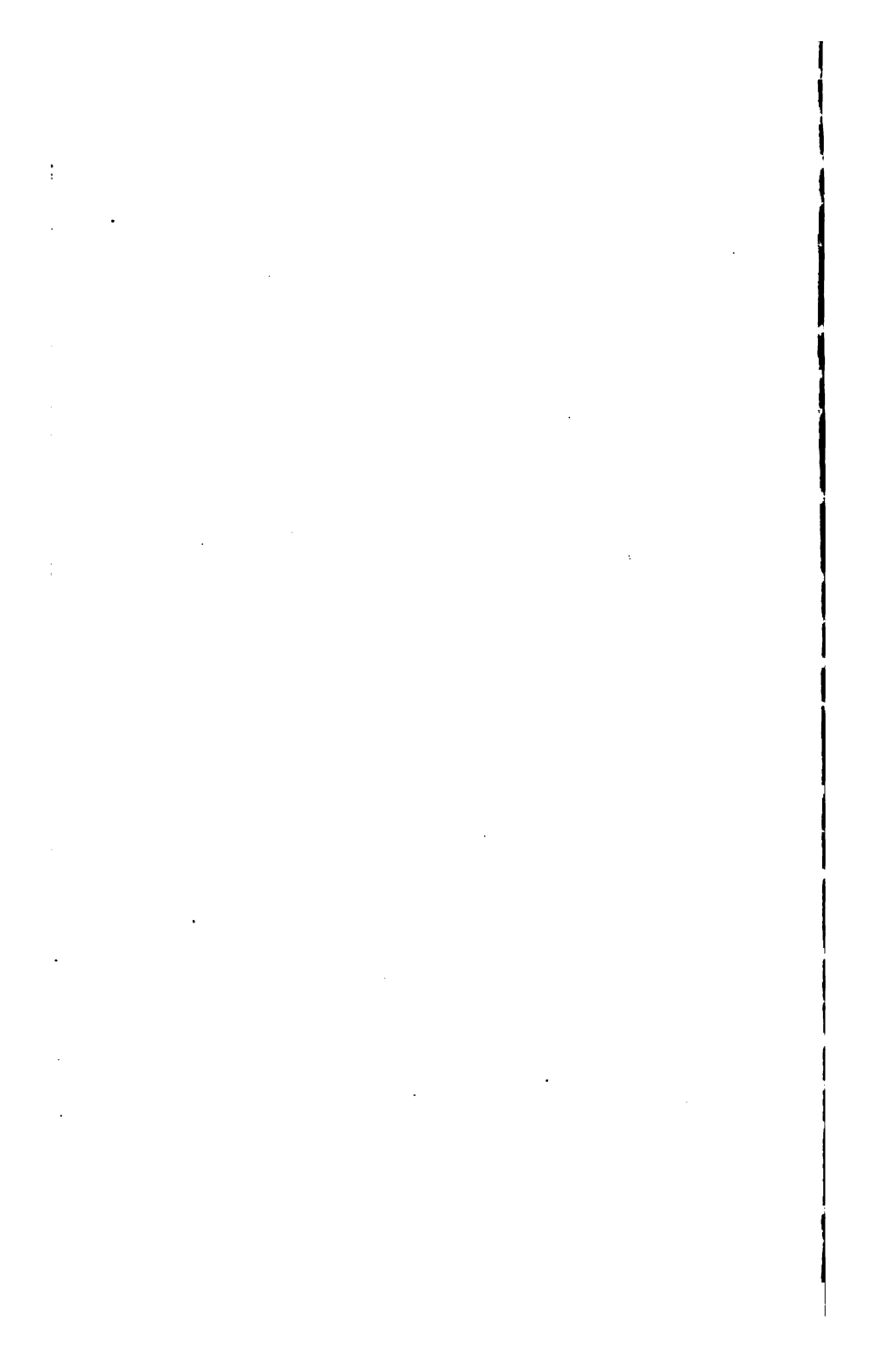








**HISTORY**  
**OF**  
**AMERICAN VERSE**





HISTORY  
OF  
AMERICAN VERSE  
(1610-1897)

BY  
JAMES L. ONDERDONK



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1901

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## Preface

**I**T is a little over four years since the pages that follow were prepared by their author for publication, but his sudden and untimely death delayed their seeing the light of day until the present time. The work of bringing them through the press has been to me a labor of love. It may be of interest to the reader of this volume to know something of its author's life.

James Lawrence Onderdonk was born at Bergen, Hudson County, New York, May 24, 1854. In due time he entered Columbia College, where in his Junior year he was awarded the Second Trustees' Prize in Greek; in his Senior year he was a member of the Phi Beta Kappa Society, and upon his graduation in 1872 he wrote the class poem and delivered an oration on "Free Trade." He at once entered the Columbia Law School; in 1874 he graduated and was admitted to the bar. A year later he received the degree of Master of Arts from his Alma Mater. For three years he practised law in New York City, and during that time published a "Political Map of the United States," which attracted considerable attention,

and was favorably noticed by many of the leading papers throughout the country. In 1878 ill-health compelled him to give up the practice of his profession in New York City, and he went West, locating for a short period of time at Corinne, Utah, where he served a term as Prosecuting Attorney. Two years later we find him representing Lemhi County, Idaho, in the lower house of legislature of that territory. His scholarship, energy, integrity, and courage in defending a cause once he had given to it his adherence, could not fail to attract attention, and he was called to fill posts of responsibility. In 1881 he was Territorial Controller; at the expiration of his term of office he was appointed Superintendent of Instruction for the Territory, and he continued in this office until 1885. His reports written in his various official capacities show a statesman's comprehension of the nature of the problems that confronted him, and a keen appreciation of the future that lay before the Territory. Mr. Onderdonk proved himself to be a man of remarkable versatility, whose patriotism was of the highest type.

In 1873 Mr. Onderdonk began to contribute articles on literary subjects to the columns of various newspapers and literary journals. Wherever he chanced to be living, he continued to prosecute his studies in literature, and numerous articles upon his favorite subject poured from his pen. This love of literary work probably was the reason for his accepting, in 1886, the position of Editor of "The Portland Daily News." After

a little over a year he moved to Chicago, where he resumed the practice of his profession, at the same time contributing a large number of articles to the leading reviews and newspapers, upon literary and timely subjects. It was during the years spent in this city that he wrote the pages that follow. In 1898 he went to Alaska to obtain material for a book on that Territory, and incidentally to do some prospecting, and there, December 20, 1899, he died, at the age of forty-five.

This outline may assist the reader to a more satisfactory appreciation of this volume than he otherwise would have. Had Mr. Onderdonk lived to superintend the book's publication he would doubtless have revised and extended his notices of certain poets whom he briefly mentions in his concluding chapter. While I am aware that as these notices stand they are not altogether so full and explicit as their subjects deserve, yet they are as he wrote them, an inherent part of the volume, and therefore I have not felt at liberty to change them. For I am persuaded that however much the reader may differ from the author's estimate of a poet or a poem, all will applaud the spirit in which that estimate is conceived and offered.

WILLIAM HOLMES ONDERDONK.

EVANSTON, ILL., *August, 1901.*



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# History of American Verse

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## CHAPTER I

### *VOICES FROM THE WILDERNESS*

1610-1708

THE age of romance had not entirely ceased in England at the beginning of the seventeenth century. It was, indeed, an era of reaction and unrest, but the afterglow of chivalry still illumined the social horizon. The feelings which animated the crusaders of the Middle Ages yet lingered in a degree, and inspired hardy adventurers to cross the seas, and penetrate the mysteries of that "Saturnian continent" which had lain hidden in the West, and for more than a century after its discovery had offered so little encouragement to colonists. This enthusiasm was, to be sure, a kind of earnestness akin to fanaticism, which, in the name of religion and humanity, tormented, maimed and burnt, beheaded, outraged and tortured; but for all it was a spirit of exploration, of investigation, and of free inquiry, though still embodied in old-world superstitions.

It was not long before false romanticism was to be ridiculed out of Europe. The year in which George Weymouth made his daring voyage to the then unknown coast of Maine witnessed the first appearance of Cervantes' great work; though it was not until five years after the first settlement of Jamestown that

"Don Quixote" became intelligible to English readers through Skelton's translation. Certainly no expedition ever left Salamanca more quixotic in its nature than that composed of men who despised labor, "dissolute gallants, broken tradesmen, gentlemen impoverished in spirit and in fortune, rakes and libertines, men more fitted to corrupt than to found a commonwealth," such as formed the nucleus of English civilization in America in 1607. But with all its faults it was a glorious era in England's history, those early years of the seventeenth century. Never before had there assembled so many brilliant wits, writers, and thinkers, as adorned the London of that day. The Elizabethan poets and dramatists still continue to influence modern thought, and seem certain to retain a commanding position as long as such a thing as literature exists. Their very names are indissolubly connected with the history of civilization. For three centuries their works have furnished inspiration to the wisest minds in all directions of intellectual activity.

The circumstances attending the founding of our nation were a blending of the simple and complex. There is no twilight dawn in which cluster the poetic legends that lend such a charm to the early traditions of other races. The hard, actual strife of the settlers against savage nature early dispelled fantastic notions of an earthly paradise or a new Arcadia. Life in the New World was filled with far sterner realities than in the Old. The colonists were themselves too busy in acting the romance of history to care about reading or writing it. They were, in a certain sense, the romancists of the world. All unconsciously to themselves, they were the actors in the great epic of humanity, laying broad and deep the foundations of

a civilization distinct from any that up to that time had ever been realized. Under their own exertions they beheld forests merging into farm-lands, the wilderness gradually blossoming into towns and villages, the original lords of the soil, at first only objects of terror, slowly receding deeper into the forest, or disappearing altogether. Burning homesteads and midnight massacres told the oft-recurring tragedy of their ordinary life. At the same time, removed from old-world conventionalisms, the cause of common humanity was receiving added dignity, and the spirit of conservative democracy was gaining strength from common hardships at home, and oppression from abroad. In the apparently endless struggle against material obstacles the development of higher literature was impossible. Colonialism is inconsistent with a noble literature. Like the arid lands of the West, our literary soil was rich in essential elements, but needed some irrigating force to quicken it into fertility. Such a force could be found in nationalism alone.

The growth of the colonies presents a singular spectacle of contrary forces developing in parallel lines. In the South a social aristocracy entrenched itself amid the crudest environments. The gradual growth of the spirit of liberty kept pace with the increasing dominance of slavery. Popular education was ignored and a free press unknown. Literature of any sort was tabooed. No native poet worthy even a relatively conspicuous place in our literature appeared in the South prior to the Revolution.

The middle colonies lacked many of the picturesque characteristics of either New England or the South. Politically, they were further advanced than their

eastern neighbors. The benign influence of William of Orange had so far stimulated native Dutch stagnation that religious freedom was introduced in New Netherlands at a very early date. In Pennsylvania liberty of conscience was recognized, and some of the earliest utterances in the cause of freedom came from Philadelphia. But the contributions by the middle colonies to higher literature prior to 1775 were light.

The social forces in New England were equally conflicting. Its civilization was designed as a protest against established forms in England. Yet it developed a hierarchy fully as despotic as any in the old world. It denounced the superstitions of Anglicanism and Romanism, while it made heresy a crime, and murdered helpless men and women charged with witchcraft. Freedom of the press as now understood was unknown. Yet it cannot be denied that New England was intellectually far stronger than its southern competitors. The prevalence of education developed a native average intelligence to which neither the southern nor the middle colonies could aspire. The native New England divines were men of strong intellectual force, however misapplied that force may have been. The New England theocracy of the eighteenth century was the lineal predecessor of at least one distinctively American school of literature.

In such barren ground for six generations of American civilization higher literature struggled for a foothold. Such flowers of poetry as succeeded in taking root in the forbidding soil are now generally interesting as historical curiosities rather than for any intrinsic beauty. Yet though in seeking to trace the influence of colonial literature upon the development of genuine poetry we may have to traverse many a

barren waste, we may occasionally meet with some modest blossom that will be not the less welcome on account of its rarity.

It was in the ill-starred colony at Jamestown that American literature had its origin. It was a transplanted product, of course, but it is interesting to note that even amid such discouraging surroundings the spirit of song was not entirely stifled.

The first published metrical effusion on American themes by one who had lived in America seems to have been produced by Mr. R. Rich, one of the earliest arrivals in Jamestown, author of "Newes from Virginia."

But one copy of the original edition is known to exist. This was discovered in a volume of tracts about 1864 by Mr. Halliwell, the well-known Shakespearean scholar. Twenty-five copies were printed in 1865, and fifteen of these destroyed. In 1874 twenty-five additional copies were printed in London for Bernard Quaritch. It is from one of the latter that our extracts are made. Of the author, but little is known beyond what is stated in the ballad itself. He returned to England with Captain Newport, where he published his work and sought to correct existing notions and to induce others to return with him. Whether he ever returned is unknown. The title-page is according to the fashion of the time, and reads as follows:—

"Newes from Virginia. The Lost Flocke Triumphant. With the happy arrival of that famous and worthy knight Sr. Thomas Gates; and the well reputed and valiant Captain Mr. Christopher Newporte, and others, into England. With the maner of their distress in the Island of Devils (otherwise called Bermoothawes) where they remayned 42 weeks, and builded two

*Pynaces*, in which they returned into *Virginia*. By R. Rich, Gent., One of the Voyage. London. Printed by Edw. Alde, and are to be sold by John Wright, at Christ Church dore, 1610."

It is not a great poem by any means, and frequently lapses into absurdest doggerel; yet it breathes a certain spirit of Americanism lacking in some of the more artificial work of the later colonial period. After a breezy introduction the author opens his case in verse. He gives a description of the wreck, the adventures on the "iland" of "Bermoothawes," the building of two gallant "pynases" of "seader tree," the safe arrival of the party in Virginia, and the Arcadian delights of life in the new world. Possibly there is a poetic license in describing the reformatory influences of the Virginia colony.

"Those men that vagrants liv'd with us, have there deserved well;  
Their governour writes in their praise, as divers letters tel.

"And to th' adventurers thus he writes, be not dismay'd at all,  
For scandal cannot do us wrong, God will not let us fall.  
Let England knowe oure willingnesse, for that our worke is good.  
We hope to plant a nation, where none before hath stood."

The natural attractions of the country and advantages accorded settlers are set forth, and the "Poem" is brought to a close with a prayer to Heaven for assistance.

This ballad was published twenty-one years before the "Sea Marke" by Captain John Smith, who is usually regarded as the earliest American author. Neither of these two writers can lay any claim to poetic genius.

It was only appropriate that the first purely literary creation of a transplanted people should be in the



shape of translation. The claims of such a work to a place in American literature, it is true, are most shadowy. The work of a native of England in interpreting the writings of a native of Italy is hardly one to which Americans, on the score of nationality, can base any strong title. But as the first really poetic effort produced in America, its importance becomes manifest.

George Sandys (1577-1644) was an Oxford graduate, and had already written some excellent books of travel, when in 1621 he was appointed treasurer of the Virginia colony.

Nothing could be more discouraging to literary life than the condition of the Jamestown settlement at this time. It was one of the most hopeless periods in the colony's history. Deprived of all the conditions that make life attractive to one of his kind, surrounded by uncongenial adventurers, and constantly threatened by barbaric foes, Sandys in his self-imposed banishment must have appreciated the feelings of his favorite Roman, exiled for years to the barbaric wilderness about the mouth of the Danube. Unlike the Roman poet, however, his translator in going into exile cannot be said to have left his genius behind him, for our poet-traveller never lost heart in the face of great discouragement. The work begun by him in England was completed in the American wilderness. The last ten of the fifteen books of Ovid's "Metamorphoses" were translated in the Jamestown colony, and in this effort of Sandys is embodied the new world's first contribution to genuine literature.

Sandys also translated part of the *Æneid*, the Psalms, and the Song of Solomon. He remained in America several years, but all his attention was not engrossed

by official and literary duties. He is said to have built the first water-mill, and to have been interested in ironwork and shipbuilding in the colony. In 1626 the completed volume of the "Metamorphoses" was published in London. The dedication of the book is to "The Most High and Mightie Prince Charles, King of Great Britain, France and Ireland," and concludes with the words —

"It needeth more than a single denization, being a double stranger, sprung from the stock of the ancient Romans, but bred in the new world of the rudeness whereof it cannot but participate, especially having Warres and Tumults to bring it to light instead of the Muses. But however imperfect, your favor is able to supply, and to make it worthy of life, if you judge it not unworthy of your royal patronage."

The work did not have to depend on royal patronage for its support. As a piece of scholarly, finished verse-making, this translation is not surpassed by anything produced during our colonial period. It received the approbation of great poets and critics. Dryden and Pope both praised it for its scholarship and poetic spirit. If not so polished as Dryden's Virgil or Pope's Homer, it still deserves high rank in the literature of translations. The last poet of the Augustan era born in the last year of the Roman republic was the first to receive attention in the American colonies. Americans certainly have no reason to feel anything but gratification at the first literary expression from this continent.

Forty years after the appearance of Sandys' translation, the rollicking figure of George Alsop emerged from the Maryland wilderness with his farrago of prose and verse, entitled "A Character of the Province of Maryland." The rhyming doggerel at the close of

each chapter is beneath criticism, hardly possessing even the merit of a literary curiosity. Alsop lived in that province from 1659 to 1663. In describing the virtues of his Marylanders, he declares:—

“Here if the lawyer had nothing else to maintain him but his brawling, he might button up his chops, and burn his buckram bag, or else hang it upon a pin until its antiquity had eaten it up with dirt and dust; then with a spade, like his grandsire Adam, turn up the face of creation, purchasing his bread by the sweat of his brows, that before was got by the motionated waterworks of his jaws. . . . The Anabaptists have little to say here, as well as in other places since the ghost of John of Leyden haunts their conventicles. The Adamite, Ranter, and Fifth Monarchy men, Maryland cannot, nay, will not digest such corroding morsels; as that this province is an utter enemy to blasphemous and zealous imprecations, drained from the limbec of Hellish and damnable spirits as well as profuse profaneness that issues from the prodigality of none but crack-brained sots.”

“’Tis said the gods lower down that chain above  
That ties both prince and subject up in love:  
Few, Maryland, in this can boast but you,  
Live ever blest, and let those clouds that do  
Eclipse most states be always lights to you.  
And dwelling so, you may forever be  
The only emblem of tranquillity.”

Colonial Maryland does not seem to have been especially fortunate in its poets. In 1708 Ebenezer Cook published in London “The Sot-Weed Factor, or a Voyage to Maryland,” describing the laws, courts, and constitutions of the country, “and also the buildings, feasts, frolics, entertainments and drunken humors of the inhabitants in that part of America.”

It is written with all the exaggeration, crudeness, and coarseness of current English satiric verse, but is

lit up with flashes of humor that make parts of it still readable. Every one is the reverse of what he should be. The Maryland men are all rogues and the women no better. Swindled at every turn, the narrator flees the country in rage, flinging upon it a withering curse, in which direful fates are invoked upon unhappy Maryland and her inhabitants. As Cook seems never to have been identified with the country, his right to a place in our national literature may be questioned. At all events, Marylanders may be pardoned for relinquishing any claim to this amusing but abusive satirist.

If under the repressive rule that marked the thirty-six years of Governor Berkeley's administration in Virginia, the voice of freedom ever found expression, nothing of interest has been preserved save the remarkable eulogy on the heroic Nathaniel Bacon in 1676. This eulogy, written shortly after the death of the "general by consent of the people," has become familiar to many readers by its frequent republication. As his "rebellion" was a significant feature in the political development of the country, so his epitaph from a friendly hand offers the most original literary achievement of which the early southern colonists can boast.

With the death of Nathaniel Bacon civil liberty in Virginia was crushed, and with it all attempts at a high grade of literature.

## CHAPTER II

### *THE PURITAN MUSE*

1624-1765

**G**LOOMY and colorless the New England civilization certainly was, from an æsthetic point of view. And no less certainly was it answerable for many grotesque vagaries. To the Puritans the world was a vale of tears, and the beautiful and the cheerful were but hollow mockeries. In the motherland they early denounced poets as "caterpillars of the commonwealth," though the greatest poet of his generation was an out and out Puritan. But after all the exaggeration that panegyric and vituperation alike have imposed upon their memory, the early Puritans still stand for the great moral force of their age. They betray much of the bigotry, intolerance, and even superstition of their times ; but through it all runs a vein of heroic endurance, of steadfastness to principle, of resignation under sorrow, and a triumphant faith that must tone down many of the rough edges in their character. Yet while this system could produce in England a Milton and a Bunyan, in America the voice of the sublime and the beautiful was strangled in the thralls of theologic disputation.

William Morrell's "Nova Anglia" (1624), and William Wood's "New England's Prospect" (1634), metrical effusions of little merit, are entitled to mention on account of priority, not as representing Puritanism. But even the Puritan divines paid some

homage to a lugubrious muse, for a number of them wrote verses of varying degrees of wretchedness. That they could not all write flowing lines for devotional use became a matter of grievous embarrassment. It was easy enough to reject written prayers, but extemporaneous praise proved a stumbling-block. It was necessary, as Richard Mather says, to have some written form, "because every good minister hath not a gift of spirituall poetry to compose extemporaneously psalmes as he hath of prayer."

Accordingly a triumvirate composed of Richard Mather, Thomas Welde, and John Eliot labored long and earnestly to supply the crying need. The result was the appearance of the first book of any importance printed in America. The "Bay Psalm-Book" was published in 1640, and, with some modifications, for more than a century retained its prestige as the chief devotional book of the colony. By 1750 it had passed through twenty-seven editions.

The preface by Richard Mather, from which we have already quoted, further says:—

"If therefore the verses are not always so smooth and elegant as some may desire or expect; let them consider that God's Altar needs not our pollishings; Ex. 20. for wee have respected rather a plaine translation then to smooth our verses with the sweetness of any paraphrase, and soe have attended Conscience rather than Elegance, fidelity rather than poetry, in translating the hebrew words into english language, and David's poetry into english meetre; that soe we may sing in Sion the Lords songs of prayse according to his owne will; untill hee take us from hence, and wipe away all our teares, & bid us enter into our masters ioye to sing eternall Halleluiahs."

That little attention was given to elegance or beauty will not be disputed. Yet did not their "Conscience,"

which they claim specially to have "attended," suffer a twinge when the grandly sonorous English of the standard translation of the Nineteenth Psalm, "The heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament sheweth His handiwork," was mutilated as follows? —

"The heavens doe declare  
the majesty of God ;  
also the firmament shews forth  
his handy-work abroad.

- 2 "Day speaks to day, knowledge  
night hath to night declar'd.
- 3 There neither speach nor language is,  
where their voyce is not heard.
- 4 Through all the earth their line  
is gone forth, & unto  
the utmost end of all the world,  
their speaches reach also ;  
A Tabernacle hee  
in them pitcht for the Sun.
- 5 Who Bridegroom like from 's chamber goes  
glad Giant's-race to run.
- 6 From heaven's utmost end,  
his course and compassing ;  
to ends of it, & from the heat  
thereof is hid nothing."

"The earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof; the world and they that dwell therein," becomes Puritanized in this strain: —

"The earth Iehovahs is,  
and the fulnesse of it ;  
the habitable world, & they  
that there upon doe sit."

The title-page of the Psalm-Book contains the quotation from the Epistle of St. James, chapter v. : "If any be afflicted, let him pray ; and if any be merry, let him sing psalmes." It is difficult to conceive the

degree of merriment that could find expression in this rendition of the Sixty-ninth Psalm:—

- “The waters in unto my soule  
are come, o God me save,  
2 “I am in muddy deep sunk downe,  
where I no standing have:  
into deep waters I am come,  
where floods me overflow.  
3 I of my crying weary am,  
my throat is dried soe.”

A second edition was published in 1647. But in the words of Cotton Mather, “It was thought that a little more of art was to be employed upon them; and for that cause they were committed unto Mr. Dunster,” of Harvard, who, with the assistance of Richard Lyon, “revised and refined this translation.” This third edition was printed in 1650. It was enriched by the addition of some “Scripture Songs,” said to be the work of Mr. Lyon. The most familiar of these is “The Song of Deborah and Barak.”

The first ambitious poetical efforts of the early colonial period, both in Virginia and in Massachusetts, were in the direction of translation. It was too early for a distinctively local literature, and in these efforts may be seen a fairly representative line of thought. The Virginia colonist found congenial work in translating the polished and often impure writings of a heathen poet. The New Englanders found equally congenial work in translating the rugged but exalted strains of the Hebrew poet. The tendencies of each were characteristic. The heathen appears in polished, stately English; the inspired Hebrew in crabbed, knotty, disjointed lines that writhe and twist in their contortions to become metrical. Yet the Bay Psalm-



Book, repellant as it is to modern taste, exerted a mighty influence in shaping the character of thousands for three generations. The more elegant work of the southern colonists never became a household classic, though after the lapse of two and a half centuries it remains much more readable than does the work of the Puritan junto.<sup>1</sup>

There is much in the externals of the lives and works of the Puritan divines to cause flippant ridicule to-day. Yet life was a terribly earnest thing for them. It was through their earnestness, convictions, and sincere faith that they accomplished what they did. Literature early gained a foothold in New England. It was not an exhilarating, stimulating product. But it was something. In order to obtain a true conception of American literature, it should be constantly borne in mind that its foundation was on the broad rocks of Protestant theology, a foundation substantial enough to endure through the ages, though in viewing the superstructure we sometimes lose sight of this support. It is true, poetry could bloom only in the crevices of such rocks, and was of too feeble a growth long to retain its beauty. Yet through the storms of centuries those stern crags of Puritan morality transmitted their veins of pure gold, invisible to the eye, but appearing as genuine metal in a later epoch.

The theology of the seventeenth century was the legitimate progenitor of much that is best in American poetry. To the severe arbitrament of an unyielding conscience was submitted every question, however

<sup>1</sup> Copies of the Bay Psalm-Book are of course exceedingly rare, though at least seven copies of the first edition are now known to be in existence. See Miss A. M. Earle's excellent little book, "The Sabbath in Puritan New England," ch. xi. (N. Y., 1891).

trivial, of life and works. It is this loyalty to conscience that is the pride and glory of the best of American poetry. There is not a line in Bryant or Longfellow, Emerson or Holmes, Lowell or Whittier, themselves all descendants of early New Englanders, that, even by indirection, breathes an impure thought. It is to this stern rock of Puritan theology, rather than to the few meagre flowers that bloom about its base, that we must trace the primal springs of American verse.

Nothing could be further from the purpose of this work than a discussion of the forms of early New England theology. They are referred to only so far as may be necessary to a correct understanding of our literary development. Thomas Hooker, John Cotton, Peter Bulkeley, and other worthies of English birth and American residence, were each and all contributing to the cause of literature. Few of them scrupled to throw a sombre drapery in the form of verse around their less ponderous efforts. In later times they even indulged in elephantine gambols supposed to be graceful, as when Cotton Mather gives vent to this strained fancy, — "Mr. Cotton, Mr. Hooker and Mr. Stone, which glorious triumvirate coming together, made the poor people in the wilderness to say, that the God of Heaven had supplied them with what would in some sort answer their three great necessities; *Cotton* for their *clothing*, *Hooker* for their *fishing*, and *Stone* for their *building*."

The death of Thomas Hooker, of Hartford, the foremost divine of his day in this country, furnished abundant opportunity for their mournful Muse. She certainly rose to the dignity of the occasion, for never before in New England had there been such a sponta-

neous tribute of prose and verse as bore testimony to the real greatness and goodness of the man. Among those who sang his requiem was Peter Bulkeley, who wrote both Latin and English verse, and who bewailed his country's loss in a poem entitled, —

"A lamentation for the death of that precious and worthy Minister of Jesus Christ, Mr. Thomas Hooker, who died July 7, 1647, as the sun was setting. The same hour of the day died blessed Calvin, that glorious light.

"Let Hartford sigh and say, I've lost a treasure,  
Let all New England mourn at God's displeasure . . .  
Of preaching he had learn'd the rightest art,  
To every one dividing his own part,  
Each ear that heard him said, *He spoke to me,*  
So piercing was his holy ministry.  
His life did shine, time's changes stain'd it not,  
Envy itself could not there find a spot."

The writer of the foregoing lines was himself a leader in the colony. The history of Peter Bulkeley and his descendants is interesting as being in itself typical of the development of one line of American thought. According to Cotton Mather, Bulkeley "was descended of an Honourable family in *Bedfordshire*. He was born at *Woodhul*, in *Bedfordshire* January 31st, 1582. His *Education* was answerable to his *Original*, it was *Learned*, it was *Genteel*, and, which was the top of it all, it was very *Pious*. At length it made him a *Bachelor of Divinity*, and a Fellow of *Saint John's Colledge* in Cambridge."

After twenty-one years of service in the English church he incurred, through some heterodox notions, the hostility of the tyrannical Laud, and was obliged to flee to America. First settling at Cambridge, he afterward removed to the banks of the Musketaquid, "and founded the town destined to be famous to all

ages as Concord." There "supreme over his people's bodies and souls, he spent the remainder of his days a protestant Pope, a republican monarch."

By an easy transition from Anglicanism to Calvinism, from Calvinism to Unitarianism, and from Unitarianism to Liberalism, the principles of Bulkeley, once Episcopal priest and fellow of St. John's College, developed through direct lineal descent into those of Ralph Waldo Emerson and the Concord School of Philosophy. In the middle of the seventeenth century, Bulkeley published his "Gospel Covenant," which seems in some passages to foreshadow the spirit of his illustrious descendant.

John Cotton was one of the intellectual giants of the pulpit, but his poetic efforts were puerile. He wrote a rhymed epitaph on his son, another on his daughter, and one on both together. His elegy on Mr. Hooker was even worse than that written by Mr. Bulkeley. After his own death, Mr. Cotton was made the subject of a famous elegy by the first graduate of Harvard College, Benjamin Woodbridge.

Thus far our attention has been occupied chiefly with the efforts of scholars who wrote verses. In no sense of the word were they poets. Their Muse was of the most solemn cast. Her favorite resort seems to have been the undertakers' shops rather than the Castalian Springs of Parnassus. One can never hear the hoof-beats of the Puritan Pegasus without expecting to see a hearse drawn behind. Any change, therefore, from the dreary level of rhymed elegies, obituaries, and epitaphs must prove a relief. In the year 1650 such a change occurred.

Anne Bradstreet, the daughter of Thomas Dudley, was born in Northampton, England, about 1612.

When but sixteen she married Simon Bradstreet, afterward colonial governor. Two years after her marriage she accompanied her husband to America. She was a gifted woman, possessed of a sensitive, refined nature, and bore with Christian resignation the fate which doomed her to a life of hardship in the wilderness, when every impulse of her nature must have yearned for the culture and society of her native land. That she was an omnivorous reader her works abundantly testify. Unfortunately, her mind was of an eminently receptive nature, and readily absorbed the influence of the worst contemporary models in England.

In the middle of the seventeenth century was published in London a small sixteenmo volume of a little over two hundred pages, bearing on its title-page these words:—

"The Tenth Muse lately sprung up in America, or Several Poems, compiled with great variety of Wit and Learning, full of Delight, wherein especially is contained a complete discourse and description of the four elements, ages of man, seasons of the year; together with an exact epitome of the four monarchies, viz: the Assyrian, Persian, Grecian, Roman; also a dialogue between old England and New concerning the late troubles; with divers other pleasant and serious poems. By a gentlewoman in those parts. Printed for Stephen Bowtell, at the sign of the Bible, in Pope's Head Alley, 1650."

Such was the formidable title of the first book of original poems composed in New England. This woman's verses are almost as unreadable to-day as are the theological tracts of her contemporaries. The title sufficiently explains the pedantic character of the work. The poems are weak in conception and feeble in execution, in spite of their grandiloquent themes.

One cannot help admiring the author's courage, however, in launching a book of verse upon the world at a time when female poets were regarded somewhat askance.

Most fulsome eulogies were pronounced upon her work. It was declared that if Virgil could hear her poems, he would cast his own into the flames. Nathaniel Ward, "The Simple Cobbler of Aggawam," wrote a sort of Puritan sonnet that was prefixed to her works. Another, in the admired style of the day, makes the far-fetched pun:—

"Her breast was a brave palace, a broad street,  
Where all heroic ample thoughts did meet."

In reference to her obligations to Du Bartas, the following anagram was inflicted on her name:—

"Anna Bradstreate, — Deer neat An bartas,  
So Bartas-like thy fine spun poems been,  
That Bartas' name will prove an epicene."

Still another could distort "Anna Bradstreate" into "Artes bred neat An," and John Rogers apostrophized her in a long poem.

*Bradstreet* If her reputation were dependent upon her first publication alone, Mrs. Bradstreet would not be entitled to a place in literature. In 1678, six years after her death, a new edition of her works was published in Boston bearing the title, "Several Poems compiled with great variety of Wit and Learning, full of Delight."

This edition contained some of her less ambitious but far more creditable work. When she consented to be true to herself and to forget Du Bartas and her other models, she was capable of producing readable

poetry. Her poem "Contemplations" is certainly the best produced in New England up to that time.

The "Tenth Muse" was a versatile one, approaching with equal indifference the subject of the rise and fall of monarchies, or the domestic affairs of her own household. She was blessed with eight children, as she informs us in a barnyard metaphor that is kept up for an indefinite number of lines. From this brood so infelicitously described were descended some of the most distinguished sons of New England, notably Dr. Holmes, Wendell Phillips, the Danas, and the Channings.

To us of to-day the literary period of America included in the century following 1650 seems one of gloom and wretchedness. The literary debauchery that followed the restoration of the House of Stuart in England happily had no counterpart in this country. If it had any effect at all it was in the nature of a reaction. A new generation had grown up under the sombre auspices of New England Calvinism, — a generation that for the most part knew no other civilization than that of the colonies. Puritanism was now thoroughly established. Heterodoxy in old England was orthodoxy in the new. The gospel of glad tidings had become the gospel of vengeance. Everything was tinctured with the spirit of grimness, of retribution, and even of horror. The God of loving-kindness was represented as a being, not of justice, but of hatred and rancor, delighting in the sufferings of erring humanity. The direct interposition of Providence was discovered in the most trivial affairs. The death of a good man, however aged, any political or social disorder, any suffering of mind, body, or estate, anything, in short, that was painful or disagreeable, was

attributed to divine wrath, rather than to the ordinary course of nature. This is manifest in the writings of the period, especially in such works as the "Wonder-working Providence of Zion's Savior in New England," published by Captain Edward Johnson of Woburn in 1654. In this narrative the interpositions of Providence were resolutely insisted upon, even in most inconsequential details. Like his clerical brethren, this warrior-author persisted occasionally in indulging in verse. He wrote elegies, as was to be expected. But his chief effort was a prolonged wail through twenty-two stanzas of unmitigated grief at the degeneracy of the age. The tenor of the whole may be surmised from the opening stanzas:—

"From silent night, true register of moans,  
From saddest soul consumed in deepest sins,  
From heart quite rent with sighs and heavy groans,  
My wailing muse her woful work begins,  
And to the world brings tunes of sad lament,  
Sounding naught else but sorrow's sad relent.

"Sorry to see my sorrow's cause argued,  
And yet less sorrowful were my sorrows more,  
Grief that with grief, is not with grief prevented,  
Yet grief it is must ease my grieved sore;  
So grief and sorrow care but how to grieve,  
For grief and sorrow must my cares relieve."

Intolerance reigned supreme. At the whims of pedantic ministers and bigoted judges innocent women were slain, sacrificed on the altar of superstition. The innocent laughter of childhood, the harmless sports of youth, all the mildest forms of social gayety or blitheness were scowled upon as unseemly and unbecoming the elect. To Satan was allowed a monopoly of all the good and cheerful things of earth. It was a period of artistic anarchy, an æsthetic reign of terror,



an apotheosis of the gloomy, the hateful, and the terrible. Anything wearing the sovereign robes of beauty was dethroned and morally guillotined. The animating motive of morality seems to have been the dread of punishment, rather than devotion to the right. As late as the middle of the eighteenth century Jonathan Edwards echoed contemporary sentiment when he declared:—

“God has laid himself under no obligation by any promise to keep the natural man out of hell one moment. The God that holds you over the pit of hell, much as one holds a spider or some loathsome insect over the fire, abhors you and is dreadfully provoked; his wrath toward you burns like fire; he is of purer eyes than to bear to have you in his sight; you are ten thousand times as abominable in his eyes as the most hateful and venomous serpent is in ours.”

It is no wonder that the spirit of poetry was gagged and choked by the sulphurous fumes of such a system. The divine goddess of song gave place to a Puritan Cassandra, prophesying only misery and woe. From henceforth during the colonial period the muse that inspired Michael Wigglesworth was typical of all New England.

While America cannot claim the honor of having given birth to this wonderful versifier, his training and affiliations were all intensely those of New England. He graduated at Harvard, where he taught as tutor, and was ordained pastor of the church at Wal-den, in 1667. He devoted his labors impartially to theology, medicine, and literature. In 1662 he produced his *magnum opus*, “The Day of Doom, or a Poetical Description of the Great and Last Judgment.”

Wigglesworth was the avatar of Calvinism pushed to its logical extreme. He was a Congregational Thomas

of Celano, inspired by the bleak east winds of Massachusetts instead of by the semi-tropical airs of Italy. The solemn music of the Gregorian chant under his hand becomes an abominable jingle, not enlivened by a single note of cheerfulness or charity. Yet his admirers could be found as late as revolutionary times. He was by all odds the most widely read of the colonial singers. The first edition of eighteen hundred copies of the "Day of Doom" was, even in the sparsely settled colony, exhausted in a little over a year. At least ten editions have been published in this country, besides one in London and one in Newcastle-on-Tyne. It was reprinted in New York in 1867 by William Henry Barr, and a sketch of his life was published in Albany as late as 1871 by John Ward Dean. Besides the "Day of Doom," Wigglesworth is responsible for a less ambitious poem entitled "Meat out of the Eater, or Meditations concerning the Necessity, End and Usefulness of Afflictions unto God's Children," which was published in 1669. Some shorter poems were printed after his death.

His "Vanity of Vanities" was appended to the sixth edition of the "Day of Doom" in 1715, and well embodies his creed in the stanza:—

"For what is Beauty but a faded flower?  
Or what is Pleasure but the Devil's bait?  
Whereby he catcheth whom he would devour,  
And multitudes of souls doth ruinate?"

[ It must be admitted that at least in his writings he lived up to his principles, for beauty and pleasure alike are abjured in them.

? Wigglesworth's masterpiece struck a responsive chord. Its spirit reflected that of the times, and

this fact explains the hearty welcome from the New Englanders of that era, and justifies our reference to him as the poet laureate of later Puritanism.

In Scripture language, paraphrased chiefly from St. Matthew and Revelation, the terrifying scenes of the judgment day on earth are realistically set forth. A separation "to sinners sad" is made betwixt the good and bad, and the judgment proceeds. Heathen who have never had the benefit of revelation vainly appeal for mercy. They must suffer the consequences of their ignorance, however, and are doomed to an eternity of woe. Reprobate infants fare but little better. The sense of justice of these protesting babes is outraged by seeing Adam, the source of all their woe, seated amongst the elect. But it is all of no use. According to Calvinistic tenets these infants, who never had a chance to repent of sins uncommitted, cannot expect the indulgence granted to converted sinners, for the Judge declares:—

" You sinners are, and such a share  
As sinners may expect,  
Such you shall have, for I do save  
None but my own elect.  
Yet to compare your sin with their  
Who liv'd a longer time,  
I do confess yours is much less,  
Though every sin 's a crime.

" A crime it is, therefore in bliss  
You may not hope to dwell,  
But unto you I shall allow  
The easiest room in hell."

After this remarkable adjudication the Judge disposes of all the remaining sinners in a manner highly satisfactory, at least to the elect.

"One natural brother beholds another  
 In his astonished fit,  
 Yet sorrows not thereat a jot  
 Nor pities him a whit."

With equal indifference "the godly wife" beholds her husband, and the husband beholds his wife, as the case may be, doomed to everlasting perdition; so, too,

"The tender mother will own no other  
 Of all her numerous brood,  
 But such as stand at Christ's right hand  
 Acquitted through His blood.  
 The pious father had now much rather  
 His graceless son should ly  
 In hell with devils, for all his evils,  
 Burning eternally."

Thereupon follows a description of the torments of the damned, in which the Wigglesworthian Muse fairly outdoes herself. Of all attempts ever made by presumptuous man to anticipate the judgments of Providence, these realistic descriptions are the most offensive. It is very delightful for the elect, however, for we are informed, —

"The saints behold with courage bold,  
 And thankful wonderment  
 To see all those that were their foes  
 Thus sent to punishment.  
 Then do they sing unto their King  
 A song of endless praise:  
 They praise His name, and do proclaim  
 That just are all His ways."

Perhaps an apology is due the reader for devoting so much attention to such a work, but it should be borne in mind that this was the representative poem of an era. It retained its hold upon people's hearts for more than a century, and cast its spirit of gloom over many a New England homestead. Its influence over the

hearts and minds of colonial Americans waned only with the waning of Puritanism itself. The generations that admired it could never have appreciated the spirit of the modern New England poet:—

“Yet in the maddening maze of things,  
And tossed by storm and flood,  
To one fixed trust my spirit clings,  
I know that God is good.”

Wigglesworth was as much the home poet of New England in parts of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries as was John G. Whittier in the nineteenth.

In a literary era overshadowed by the spirit of Wigglesworth, death and the tomb are naturally the most prolific topics. It is a wearisome journey among these graveyards of the past, and it is unnecessary to harrow the reader's literary sensibilities with an exhaustive survey. Conspicuous among them all in poetic merit is the lament of Urian Oakes on the death of Thomas Shepard. Its dignity of expression and stately rhythm, its sincerity and impassioned sorrow, appeal to the heart as few such productions can. It was published about 1677, and is the only extant poem of any length by its author. In spite of its occasional faults of diction, it rises so far above the level of contemporary verse as to deserve a prominent place in our early literature. It is the loftiest poetic strain that has been wafted down to us from the iron age of Puritanism. Its length precludes its reproduction in full, but a single stanza will serve as an illustration:—

“Could I take highest flights of fancy, soar  
Aloft; if wit's monopoly were mine;  
All would be much too low, too light, too poor,  
To pay due tribute to this great divine.  
Ah! wit avails not when th' heart's like to break,  
Great griefs are tongue-tied, when the lesser speak.”

Younger than Oakes by about two years was Benjamin Tompson, born at Braintree, Massachusetts, July 14, 1642. So far as known he is the first native American poet. He graduated at Harvard when twenty years old, and taught school for nearly half a century. On his tombstone at Roxbury he was described as "a learned schoolmaster and physician, and ye renowned poet of New England." According to the eternal fitness of things perhaps we should expect our first native singer to be a sufficiently typical American to relax his adherence to conventionalism, and show faith in the future and confidence in humanity. If we look for any such spirit in our first bard we shall be disappointed. The only respect, perhaps, in which he shows the "aggressive American spirit" is in the vastness, not the originality, of his theme. Hitherto his predecessors and contemporaries have limited themselves to rhymed elegies on departed individuals. Mr. Tompson transcends them all in their chosen field by singing an elegy upon a whole generation.

The source of our first bard's inspiration was not the future, but the past; not faith, but doubt; not life, but death. He can see nothing good in his own generation, and seems to believe that all the good and great of New England are under ground. He was an easy victim to the doleful spirit of the age. The work by which he is chiefly known, "New England's Crisis," was published about 1675.

In full accord with the painful bards of Massachusetts was Roger Wolcott, born in Windsor, Connecticut, in 1679. His career was typically American of the early days. With but little schooling he served his time as a mechanic, and in later years held many offices of trust and honor in the province. His book, entitled

"Poetical Meditations; Being the Improvement of Some Vacant Hours," was published in 1725. The crudeness of these "meditations" bears evidence of their author's lack of culture, though they are not without a certain rugged force.

In one of his meditations he repeats in various forms the question whether life is worth living, and almost concludes to meet "The King of Terrors, bravely undismayed."

"And so might be my choice, but that I see  
Hell's flashes folding through eternity;  
And hear damn'd company that there remain  
For very anguish gnaw their tongues in twain."

But in spite of terrible threats Wolcott died peacefully in his bed at the good old age of fourscore and ten.

Jane Turell, the daughter of Benjamin Colman, and child wife of Ebenezer Turell, was one of the most interesting products of the Puritan era. Born in 1708, and dying in 1735,<sup>1</sup> her childish achievements are remarkable not only for their promise, but as indicating the sort of culture enjoyed in scholarly New England homes, even in that early day.

Her lines on "The Incomparable Mr. Waller," show that her studies had not been in vain so far as "easi-

<sup>1</sup> Her widowed husband was within the year married to Lucy Davenport, who died May 17, 1759, and in the following year he married, thirdly, Jane, daughter of William Pepperill, then the widow of William Tyler. "By this marriage he became the brother-in-law of his former father-in-law, Dr. Colman, who had married Mary, another daughter of Pepperill, and who survived him to take a third husband. As Dr. Colman married three times, and his second wife was four times married, and his third wife three times, while Turell's third wife was also three times wedded, we can conceive that the survivor must have had a numerous circle of connections whose ramifications are a puzzle even to the professed genealogist."

ness of expression," if not grammatical correctness, is concerned.

Waller had been dead over twenty years before Jane Turell was born, but he still directed the style of colonial writers, and whatever else may be said of his method, its influence was potent in greatly improving current styles of versification. It is a great advance, in form at least, from the ragged verses of the Bay Psalm-Book by learned divines to the hymn written by Jane Turell in her eleventh year, wherein she sings:—

"Happy are they that walk in wisdom's ways,  
That tread her paths and shine in all her rays."

The influence of Waller was destined ere long to be eclipsed by that of a far more famous poet. As a general rule colonial singers were a generation behind their models, but there was one notable exception. The English poet who most affected his Puritan contemporaries was a Roman Catholic by birth and education. While the Puritan bards were delivering themselves of their everlasting elegies, epigrams, and wretched literary conceits, there was growing up in England a lad crippled from birth, who in very infancy "lisp'd in numbers," and who for years was to be the supreme arbiter of the literary world. He was probably not so widely read in New England during the first half of the eighteenth century as was the author of the "Day of Doom," but his influence on New England verse was immediate.

In 1727, Mather Byles, of Boston, writing to the high priest of literature, remarks:—

"Fame, after a man is dead, has been by some ingenious writers compared to an applause in some distant region. If



this be a just similitude, you may take pleasure of an admired name in America, and of spreading a transport over the face of a new world, by which you may in some measure, imagine the renown in which your name will flourish many ages to come, and anticipate a thousand years of futurity.

"To let you see a little of the reputation which you bear in these unknown climates, and the improvements we are making under your auspicious influence, in the polite studies of the Muses, I transmit to you the enclosed Poems: Assuring myself though not of the appreciation of your judgment, yet of the excuse and lenity of that candor which is forever inseparable from a great genius. But notwithstanding all the representations of your goodness, which my imagination is able to form, I find it is very difficult to suppress the struggle of passions which swell my breast, while I am writing a letter to so great a man. How often have I been soothed and charmed with the ever blooming landscapes of your Windsor Forest? And how does my very soul melt away, at the soft complaint of the laughing Eloisa. How very frequently has the Rape of the Lock commanded the various passions of my mind; provoked laughter, breathed a tranquillity, or inspired a transport; and how often have I been raised and borne away by the resistless fire of the Iliad as it glows in your immortal translation."

This combination of gush and truculency fairly represents the attitude of the later colonial singers. The "auspicious influences" alluded to by Mr. Byles continued for a century to inspire American verse-makers. American poetry, in echoing and re-echoing the tones of the artificial school, seemed to preserve the faults without the virtues of the great exemplar. Whatever might be the spirit, the garb for the most part was that of Pope. During the first half of the eighteenth century the New England singers hardly got beyond the elegiac stage, even while parading in the trappings of

pseudo-classicism. Byles himself made many of his metrical attempts in this direction, and wrote elegies on the death of Governor Belcher's wife, the death of the queen, and the death of the governor's brother-in-law. "The Comet" and "The Conflagration" were sung in improved rhymed pentameters. He was a versatile writer, but his forte was writing sermons, not songs. He was a reputed wit as well as rhymester, and a number of his bonmots have been preserved in different works relating to that period. One of his popular hymns was the subject of a rather clever parody by Joseph Green, and the parody was reparodied by Mr. Byles; but the parody on the parody is remarkable chiefly for its coarseness. His most ambitious effort seems to have been "The Conflagration," showing that Wigglesworthism is still paramount, even in its Popean environment. In spite of the adulation of contemporaries, Mr. Byles' poetry must strike modern taste as insufferably dull and insipid.

With the name of Mather Byles is necessarily associated that of Joseph Green, already referred to. They were both born in Boston in the year 1708, and both wrote verse grave and gay. Green seems to have been the better humorist of the two; for obvious reasons it is difficult to say which was the greater poet.

It is as a satirist that Mr. Green is now best remembered. His chief production (even satires in that day took the prevalent form of elegy) was "A Mournful Lamentation for the Sad and Deplorable Death of Mr. Old Tenor." So far as we are aware it is the first occasion in which the American muse has invaded the precincts of political economy.

Byles and Green were companions in literature, each contributing to a volume of "Poems by Several

Hands" in 1744, and remained companions in disloyalty to native land. Both deserted their country's cause in her hour of need and became stanch apologists of the Tory cause.

Associated with Byles and Green in the preparation of "Poems by Several Hands" was the gifted young clergyman, John Adams, who died at Cambridge in 1740, in his thirty-sixth year. His poems were published separately after his death. His eulogist declares: "His own works are the best encomium that can be given him, and as long as learning and politeness shall prevail, his sermons shall be his monument, and his poetry his epitaph." Monument and epitaph alike have passed from the public mind, though learning and politeness are doubtless as prevalent as they were a century and a half ago. Mr. Adams' poems have gone the way of all imitations, and are not worthy of resuscitation. His "Address to the Supreme Being," paraphrase of Revelation, translations of Horace, his lines descriptive of "The Contented Man," and of Love and Beauty, his address to Mr. Turell "on the Death of his Virtuous Consort," beginning —

"The darts of death within her bosom deep  
Have urged the fatal wound and fixed the lasting sleep,"

— all betraying more or less the influence of the artificial school, are only evidences of the old mistake of confounding a poetic taste with poetic talent.

The gloomy era could not last forever. Other themes than death and the judgment day began to attract readers. A counter-irritant was found in the works of Nathaniel Ames, physician and astronomer, of Dedham, Massachusetts, who anticipated Benjamin Franklin in making the annual almanac a medium

of good literature. He made no special pretensions to poetic ability, but his efforts show more of the true spirit than do those of many of his more aspiring predecessors. Under his genial influence the spirit of gloom becomes one of good-natured banter. He prophesies, in mock heroics, the end of the world, when the moon will turn to blood and the stars will fall from their places.

His almanac for 1758 has a noble prediction concerning America, concluding in these words:—

“Shall not then those vast quarries that teem with mechanic stone, those for structure to be piled into great cities, and those for sculpture into statues to perpetuate the honor of renowned heroes; even those who shall serve their country? O! Ye unborn inhabitants of America, should this page escape its destined conflagration at the year's end, and these alphabetical letters remain legible — when your eyes behold the sun after he has rolled the seasons round for two or three centuries more, you will know that in Anno Domini 1758 we dreamed of your times.”

This pleasant prophecy forms a fitting close to this chapter. The doleful era is passing away. Above the gloomy songs of death and doom comes this clear voice, like the spirit of dawn after a long and dreary night.

## CHAPTER III

### *LITERATURE IN THE MIDDLE COLONIES*

1688-1765

OUTSIDE of New England the number of colonial singers was insignificant, and the results of their labors meagre. A greater variety of theme will be found to prevail, a more cheerful view of life and affairs, and a greater freedom from ecclesiasticism. The middle and southern colonial singers were less scholarly than their Puritan contemporaries, and paid less heed to models either in books or morals. The only province that could compare with Massachusetts in literary achievement was Pennsylvania. The writers of that colony have received from posterity tardy recognition as compared with the Puritan singers, but perhaps that is not the fault of posterity.

Pennsylvania had few points in common with Massachusetts. It is true both were founded on a religious system, but the civilization of the Quakers was of a milder type, and with a broader humanitarian spirit than that of the Pilgrims and Puritans. The early inhabitants of the province being from different nationalities, showed a more cosmopolitan spirit, a more nearly just appreciation of human rights, than appeared in the bleaker northeast.

There were no learned divines among them to issue their ponderous volumes of sermons, to reel off everlasting elegies on the death of a professional brother, or to frighten the timid with lurid pictures of the day

of doom. For the most part they were a simple folk, worrying themselves but little about their neighbors' sins.

Toward the close of the seventeenth century, however, there was a "Pennsylvania Pilgrim" who sang his songs on the banks of the Delaware, and was himself destined to be the subject of poetry nearly two hundred years later.

Francis Daniel Pastorius was born in Sommerhausen, Germany, in 1651. He was educated in all the science of his age, was a learned linguist, with some pretensions as a jurist. While still a young man he was converted to the doctrines of the Friends, came to Pennsylvania in 1683, and in the same year founded Germantown, where he died in 1719. He it was who in 1688 drew up the first memorial against slaveholding. He included among his acquaintances many of the most learned men in the Old World and the New. The great bulk of his manuscript has been lost, though his eulogist refers to one huge folio manuscript of a thousand pages, with a hundred lines to the page. It was entitled "Hive Bee-stock, Melliotropeum Alucar, or Rusca Apium." It is a medley of fact and fiction, prose and poetry, science and pedantry, written in seven languages. It is in allusion to this that his poet-biographer pleasantly writes:—

"At evening while his wife put on her look  
Of love's endurance, from its niche he took  
The written pages of his ponderous book.

"And read in half the languages of man  
His 'Rusca Apium,' which the bees began  
And through the gamut of creation ran."

Posterity could never emulate the faithful wife in her "look of love's endurance" regarding this mass of

material. The works of the linguist, jurist, and mystic of the wilderness are all forgotten, save his Latin "Ode to Posterity," prefixed to the Germantown records in 1688, and made familiar through Whittier's translation.

The influence of the early Quaker poets upon our literature is unimportant. The dominating influence of the Friends had greatly weakened before the eighteenth century had passed its first quarter. They continued to control legislation, however, and in later years, by refusing to appropriate funds for war with the Indians, greatly embarrassed the white settlers. Besides being inclined to be friendly with the Indians, the Quakers carried their anti-war principles to an extreme. Factional feeling ran high. The local literature of the period reflects the bitterness of each side. A partisan of the Paxton, or anti-Quaker, faction gave vent to his feelings in some taunting verses entitled "The Cloven Foot Discovered." The Quaker side found expression in "The Paxtoniade," a drivelling imitation of "Hudibras."

Most of the Pennsylvania singers whose names are remembered owe their survival to the casual references in Franklin's Autobiography, rather than to anything that they themselves wrote. The earliest of these, though he was never seen by Franklin, was Aquila Rose, described as an "ingenious young man of excellent character, much respected in the town, clerk of the assembly, and a pretty poet." When Franklin met Keimer in Philadelphia, the latter was composing an elegy on Rose; "Keimer made verses, too," says Franklin, "but very indifferently. He could not be said to write them, for his manner was to compose directly out of his head."

Aquila Rose was born in England about 1695, came to America while still young, and died in Philadelphia when but twenty-eight years old. He had been dead seventeen years when a pamphlet of fifty-six pages was published at Philadelphia entitled "Poems on Several Occasions by Aquila Rose; to which are prefixed some other pieces writ to him, and to his memory after his decease." However exalted may have been Rose's personal character, which contemporary tributes place beyond question, his verse rarely rises above commonplace. The "Elegy on Rose" which Franklin found Keimer composing is one of the curiosities of our literature, illustrating how close seriously intended panegyric may come to the burlesque and even the idiotic.

In his Autobiography Dr. Franklin mentions the names of several Philadelphians who were members of his club called "The Junto." Among these was George Webb, an Oxford scholar, who ran away from home and came to Philadelphia. He was the author of a "poem" called "Bachelors' Hall," for which a short rhyming preface was written by Joseph Breintnall, another member of "The Junto." Still another member was Nicholas Scull, a young surveyor, who also persisted in writing verse. He wrote "Kawanio Che Keeteru; A True Relation of a Bloody Battle fought between George and Lewis." Though why it was ever published is not obvious. Franklin himself wrote verses fully as bad as those of his associates. In his best known poem he refers to poets as the waste paper of mankind, a judgment fully justified if based on the poetical achievements of "The Junto."

But of all the companions of Franklin, the one who gained the greatest literary notoriety, if not fame, was



James Ralph, who was born in Philadelphia about 1695. When Franklin made his first visit to England in 1724, Ralph accompanied him, abandoning his family to their fate in Philadelphia. Before leaving America, Ralph had made up his mind to be a poet. "I did all I could to dissuade him from it," says Franklin, "but he continued scribbling verses till Pope cured him." Ralph had written something called "Night." The cure administered by Pope was in the third book of "The Dunciad:"—

"Silence, ye wolves! while Ralph to Cynthia howls,  
And makes Night hideous— Answer him, ye owls!"

The healing effects of this couplet were apparently in no degree lessened by the following explanatory note by Mr. Pope:—

"James Ralph, a name inserted after the first editions, not known till he writ a swearing piece called 'Sawney' very abusive of Dr. Swift, Mr. Gay and myself. These lines allude to a thing of his called 'Night,' a poem. This low writer attended his own works with panegyrics in the journals, and one in particular praised himself highly above Mr. Addison, in wretched remarks upon that author's account of English poets, printed in a London journal, September 1728. He was wholly illiterate and knew no language, not even French. Being advised to read the rules of dramatic poetry before he began a play, he smiled and replied, 'Shakespeare writ without rules.' He ended at last in the common sink of all such writers, a political newspaper, to which he was recommended by his friend Arnauld, and received a small pittance for pay; and being detected in writing on both sides on one and the same day, he publicly justified the morality of his conduct."

Ralph was a prolific writer. In 1728 he published "The Muses' Address to the King," "The Tempest,"

and a volume of essays entitled "The Touchstone;" in 1729, "Clarinda," a poem, and the epic by which he is still remembered in this country, "Zeuma, or The Love of Liberty." Of one of his political pamphlets, "The Groans of Germany," over fifteen thousand copies were sold at once. His "History of England" was praised by Charles James Fox, and his prose works generally evince more ability than his poems.

"Zeuma" has been more fortunate than most of its author's poems, and has enjoyed a sort of fragmentary immortality in extracts published in several anthologies of American literature. It is a tale of the conquest of Peru, and aims to give a description of the idyllic character of the ancient Peruvians, not entirely justified by what is known of that ill-fated people. Ralph was also author of several dramas which an inappreciative posterity has allowed to slumber. As he abjured his Americanism when he deserted his family and native land, America can lay no claims to these dramatic productions, composed in England, and having nothing American in their theme or treatment.

Far above the dreary level of mediocrity of most of the Pennsylvania versifiers was the genius of Thomas Godfrey. This young singer, born in Philadelphia in 1736, apprenticed to an uncongenial trade, and endowed with limited culture, early gave evidence of strong poetic tastes. He died suddenly when only twenty-six years old, and it was not until after his death that his works were published in book form. His poems naturally betray the faults of juvenility, but are written in a higher key and truer rhythm than the average American verse of the time. In his twenty-second year he produced his most memorable work, "The Prince of Parthia," a tragedy. It enjoys

the distinction of being the first poetic drama written in America. It is not necessary to be severely critical of a dramatic effort of a young man who has barely attained his majority. In the most difficult species of composition it is sufficient to say this young poet displays strength and ability in spite of a tendency to the penny dreadful. Shakespeare seems to have been the young poet's model in his tragedy, and Chaucer in his other long poem, "The Court of Fancy." Godfrey's efforts are marked by a refined taste and correct style, rather than by any evidence of inventive genius. It is idle to speculate upon what he might have done if he had attained the maturity of his powers. As it is, he remains a conspicuous figure among the colonial verse writers. Brilliant as was the promise, the actual performance hardly raises him above the crowded ranks of those whom early death has enrolled among the world's great possibilities.

Nathaniel Evans, editor of Godfrey's posthumous volume, was another singer cut off in early manhood. He was born in Philadelphia in 1742, visited England in 1765, and returning to America, died in 1767. His poems were collected and published after his death. They indicate a clever knack at rhymes, without exhibiting any great degree of poetic merit. His "Ode on the Prospect of Peace, 1761," has been overpraised. It is like countless other performances upon similar themes, though there are some creditable lines prophetic of the "immortal lays" to be inspired by the dawn of peace in his native province. The most interesting of all his poems is his tribute "To Benjamin Franklin, Esq., LL.D." It is probably the only instance of our colonial muse appropriately singing the praises of physical science. As a feeble premonition

of the "poetry of the future," in relation to science, the following lines deserve attention:—

"What wonder struck us when we did survey  
The lambent lightnings innocently play,  
And down thy rods beheld the dreaded fire  
In a swift flame descend, — and then expire;  
While the red thunders, roaring loud around,  
Burst the thick clouds, and harmless smite the ground!  
Blest use of art! applied to serve mankind,  
The noble province of the sapient mind!  
For this the soul's best faculties were given,  
To trace great nature's laws from earth to heaven."

The Indian wars of this period inspired one remarkable work deserving at least a cursory notice.

Major Robert Rogers was a native of New Hampshire, well known throughout the colonies as a bold Indian fighter, and possessing some literary ability. He was author of an American tragedy published in London in 1765, the year after Godfrey's drama was printed. This production, "Ponteach, or the Savages of America," has received little attention in this country.<sup>1</sup> Judging from the copious extracts by Parkman and Duyckinck, the work is below Godfrey's tragedy in literary or poetic ability. It possesses a local flavor in its depiction of Indian affairs, though there seems to be no basis in history for the remarkable plot. The drama opens with a dialogue between two Indian traders, who concoct a scheme for swindling the savages in bartering for peltries. The chief interest centres in the machinations of the jealous Philip, son of Pontiac, to prevent his own brother Chekitan from securing the hand of Monelia, daughter of Hendrik,

<sup>1</sup> "It is very rare, and beside the copy in my possession, I know of but one other, which may be found in the library of the British Museum." *Parkman's Pontiac*, I. 164.

Emperor of the Mohawks. In the last act Monelia is killed; Philip's treachery to his brother is discovered. The brothers fight, Philip is slain, and Chekitan kills himself. Ponteach, after the death of his two sons, and the defeat of his followers by the English, withdraws to the western forest.

As Godfrey's work retains an interest from the fact of its being the first tragedy composed in America, so Rogers' effort must be recognized as the first poetic drama by a native American dealing with American themes.

Colonial New York contributed little to the development of higher literature. New Netherland under the Dutch hardly offered a congenial soil for such a pursuit. It would be unjust, however, to ignore the claims of three Dutch singers to recognition on the ground of priority, if not of poetic merit. Jacob Steendham, the first writer of verse in New Amsterdam, was born in Holland in 1616. The time and place of his death are unknown. In 1649 and 1650 he had published at Amsterdam his poetical volume, "Den Distelvink." It was probably not long after the last date that he arrived in New Netherland, for we find him purchasing a lot at Flatlands in 1652. Three of his poems relating to New Amsterdam have been preserved and translated by Henry C. Murphy. In 1659, Steendham published his poem of about two hundred lines entitled "Klagt van Nieuw Amsterdam," — "The Complaint of New Amsterdam." The little Dutch settlement is represented as the daughter of old Amsterdam, with the god of war for her father. Abandoned by her mother, the infant is left to the care of sponsors, the West India Company, and becomes the prey of the British, who are symbolized in

the form of swine. In spite of adversities, the founding prospers, the neglect of friends being more than compensated by the gifts of nature. The poem ends with an appeal to the mother for protection, and men to till the land. The "Klagt" was followed two years later by a much longer poem, "'T Lof van Niew Nederland." This and "Prickel Vaersen" (1662) are more elaborate than the "Complaint," being metrical descriptions of the attractions offered by the New World.

A more important person than Steendham, so far as influence on American history is concerned, was Dominie Henricus Selyns (1636-1701), who was descended from a long line of ministers in Holland, and worthily sustained the name and fame of his ancestry. In 1660 he was appointed to the ministry of the church at "Breukelen" in New Netherland. He is still remembered as the only minister stationed at Brooklyn before the Revolution. According to stipulation he remained at that place only four years, returning to Holland in 1664. In 1682 he accepted a call to the First Reformed Dutch Church of New York, in which place he passed the rest of his life, an honored pastor, and a public-spirited, liberal-minded citizen. He took an active interest in the exciting questions of the day, and, though not always politic in the expression of his opinions, was esteemed by all for his sincerity. His tolerance of opinion is shown in his kindly expressions concerning William Penn and Cotton Mather. He left some verses which remained in manuscript for nearly two centuries. They are of the kind generally styled "occasional," and are chiefly tributes to the merits or memories of personal friends. Those translated by Mr. Murphy are especially valuable for their references to contemporary events. The "Bruydloft

Toorts" contains the only contemporary reference in New Netherland to the great earthquake and meteoric phenomena that disturbed the continent from Canada to Mexico. The poet also commemorates Dominie Nicholas Rensalaer, the "prophet" of Albany, who, among other predictions, foretold the restoration of Charles II. Dominie Megapolensis, Governor Stuyvesant, and other contemporary worthies are also the subjects of his verse. It is these allusions to men and events that make the good Dominie's poetic experiments of historic importance.

The third of this little group was Nicasius de Sille, who was born in Holland near the beginning of the seventeenth century. He is said to have been an accomplished lawyer and man of affairs. He came to New Netherland in 1653, as first councillor to the colonial government, and was subsequently attorney-general and sheriff of New Amsterdam. He was one of the proprietors of New Utrecht on Long Island, and kept the records of that town. It is in those records that his few metrical efforts have been preserved. The best that can be said of them is that they bear favorable comparison with the mass of amateur verse of that period.<sup>1</sup>

The works of few poetical writers in the English language in New York survived the Revolution. There was one rhymester, however, who, while Byles and other New England writers were swelling the chorus of the disciples of Mr. Pope, was contributing his efforts in a similar strain.

William Livingston was born in Albany in 1723, graduated at the head of his class at Yale in 1741,

<sup>1</sup> See "Anthology of New Netherland," by Henry C. Murphy. Bradford Club Series, No. 4. N. Y., 1865.

and was admitted to the bar seven years later. In his youth he published "The Art of Pleasing," "a juvenile performance, written in imitation of Horace's Epistle 'ad Pisones,'"<sup>1</sup> which seems to have been destined to early oblivion, as it is now utterly unknown.

The poem to which he owes his reputation as a verse writer was published in 1747, when its author was but twenty-four years old. It was entitled "Philosophic Solitude, or the Choice of Rural Life: A Poem by a gentleman educated at Yale College. *Me placeant omnia sylvae. Virg. Otium sine literis mors est, et vivi homininis sepultura. Sen.*" It consists of about seven hundred lines of heroic verse, was republished at Boston in 1762, and has been several times reprinted since the Revolution.

Mr. Livingston all his life was as bitter an opponent of the Thirty-nine Articles as was any Puritan divine, but his muse was of a gentler type than her New England sister. Other sources of inspiration were found than Calvinistic theology, or adulatory elegies and eulogies. In easy flowing verse the young poet sang the delights of solitude, rural life, and domestic affairs. His verse is in the conventional style and soon becomes wearisome, but is interesting as showing the youthful tastes of one destined to become an heroic figure in an heroic age. The lines on the ideal wife<sup>2</sup> have been frequently quoted in our literary anthologies. It is imaginable that the world at large may not feel an overweening interest in the impossible being conjured up by Livingston the poet. But it is a matter of history that in his domestic affairs Living-

<sup>1</sup> *Memoir of the Life of William Livingston*, by Theodore Sedgwick, Jun. N. Y., 1833, p. 61.

<sup>2</sup> "The Wife" [*Philosophic Solitude*, 1747].



ston the man was most fortunate. His political career precluded the realization of his early dreams of Arcadian happiness, at least so far as related to the study of the delectable Watts, while arrayed in ram's skin for clothing. It is as the revolutionary hero of New Jersey, the gentle scholar and stalwart patriot, the idol of friends and terror of foes, the honored citizen and soldier, the friend and adviser of Washington, the early champion of emancipation and the liberator of his own slaves, that William Livingston deserves a conspicuous place in our political history. In view of his public achievements, posterity can afford to deal gently with his youthful literary experiments.

## CHAPTER IV

### *HINTS OF NATIONALISM*

1725-1776

**A**MONG nearly all nations the ballad in some form has embodied the earliest attempts at a literature. As the songs of the people, rather than of the cultured classes, the ballads form the best reflex of current sentiment and feeling. Percy's "Reliques" and Scott's "Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border" afford the groundwork for some of the most brilliant pages of romance.

The conditions existing in the American colonies offered excellent background for this species of literature. The obstacles with which the settlers had to contend; the dangers everywhere lurking about them; the superstitions and traditions of the race that was fading before them; the episodes arising out of the witchcraft delusion; the spirit of liberty breathed by every utterance of nature; the gigantic struggle between European forces echoed in the American wilderness, — these and many other striking incidents afforded abundant opportunity for the inspiration of folk-songs and martial poetry. That there were homely songs and ballads inspired by local events, sung at every hearthstone and around every camp-fire, keeping alive the spirit of martial courage and patriotism, there is now no doubt. The bulk of these perished

with the occasions that inspired them. Even the "infectious frenzy of psalm-singing" among the Puritans did not altogether blight the impulses of loyalty. Nothing better illustrates the temper of the colonists than the spirit of song, not always the most tuneful, perhaps, but breathing the sentiment of loyalty, even amid wrongs and injustice, as long as that loyalty meant something more than the sacrifice of honor and freedom.

In that class of literature, which occupies in our early history a position somewhat analogous to that of the ballad in other nations, we shall find nothing approaching "the picturesque energy and simple pathos" of the early Scotch and English ballads, like "Chevy Chase," "The Nut Brown Maid," "Sir Patrick Spens," or "The Gaberlunzie Man." Instead we shall have to content ourselves with such crude effusions as "Lovewell's Fight," tributes to General Wolfe, laments for ill-fated Braddock, and the anti-Gallic utterances of Tilden, Maylem, Prime, and others. These are referred to not because of any poetic merits whatever, but as indicating the growth of popular sentiment as it found expression in the songs of the people.

The region about Lovewell's, or Lovell's Pond, near Fryeburg, Maine, has some pretensions as classic ground for the student of American literature. Near it, in 1725, was fought a bloody skirmish between colonists and Indians, resulting in the loss of Captain Lovewell and a number of his followers, all substantial men in the settlements. A brilliant victory was achieved though the Indians greatly excelled in numbers. It was this "battle" that inspired the earliest military ballad composed in America now extant. It was written shortly after the fight itself, though its

authorship is unknown. It is said to have been exceedingly popular in its day, and in recent times has been reprinted probably more than any other poem written before the Revolution. It must be admitted that in its lines the Christians do not always display the most exalted standard of civilized warfare. The opening stanzas describe the efforts of the company to capture a solitary Indian. Having successfully surrounded this one hostile savage, —

“They came unto this Indian, who did them thus defy,  
As soon as they came nigh him two guns he did let fly,  
Which wounded Captain Lovewell, and likewise one man more,  
But when this rogue was running, they laid him in his gore.

“Then having scalped the Indian, they went back to the spot,” etc.

A good description, in the main historically correct, is given of the fight that ensued, the balladist informing us:—

“Our worthy Captain Lovewell among them then did die,  
They kill’d Lieutenant Robins, and wounded good young Frye,  
Who was our English chaplain; he many Indians slew,  
And some of them he scalped when bullets round him flew.”

Those were rude times, and it was not considered inconsistent with clerical dignity for ministers of the gospel to give practical aid in exterminating the heathen. Thomas Symmes published an account of the affair as detailed by the survivors on their way home. The “Chaplain Frye” alluded to is described as a young gentleman of liberal education, who had taken his degree at Harvard two years before, and was greatly beloved for his excellent performances and good behavior. He fought with undaunted courage until mortally wounded. “But when he could fight no longer, he prayed audibly several times for

the preservation and success of the residue of the company." <sup>1</sup>

The tragic death of this young chaplain was the subject of another ballad, which seems to have perished utterly. At any rate, I can find no other trace of it than the mention made by Dr. S. L. Knapp, who appears to have been in possession of the manuscript as late as 1829. In referring to this elegy Dr. Knapp writes:—

"If it does not burn with a Sapphic blaze, it gives more of the light of history than all the odes of the Lesbian dame on her lost Phaon. Miss Susannah Rogers calls on the Muse to assist her in describing the youthful warrior, who was resting without his shroud on the field of glory. . . . His valor, his piety, his prayers amidst the fight, his wounds all bleeding, pass in review before her streaming eyes, and she sees the howling wilderness where he fell. She notes the fortitude and resignation with which he died, or rather his exhibition of it when they left him to die, for he was not dead when his companions were under the necessity of leaving him to perish. The parental grief is not forgotten, and her own loss is touched upon with truth and delicacy."

The fight near Lovewell's Pond has still another claim on the ground of literary priority. Nearly a hundred years after its occurrence it was the subject of a third ballad. On November 17, 1820, the Portland "Gazette" printed the first poetical venture of a lad of thirteen years. It bore the title of "The Battle of Lovell's Pond." Its author never included it among his published works, and it is only since his death that it has become familiar to the present generation. The smooth versification of this boyish effort

<sup>1</sup> "Lovewell Lamented; or a sermon occasioned by the fall of the brave Captain John Lovewell." By Rev. Thomas Symmes. 1725.

is suggestive as a foreshadowing of the artistic spirit that was in later years to become renowned in the works of Henry W. Longfellow.

Naturally the anti-Gallic spirit was very strong in the colonies during the middle years of the eighteenth century, and found expression in popular verse. It is not surprising, therefore, that the doggerel of the rhymesters of that day should have inspired genuine enthusiasm. War verse is apt to be poor literature. It is only by placing one's self fully in accord with those times that the real spirit of such local and transitory effusions can be appreciated. To us of to-day the great mass of our ballad literature of the eighteenth century is drivel, yet those efforts conveyed thoughts and sentiments in words that burned, though the fire has long since gone from them.

One of the earliest books of war poetry published in this country was Tilden's "Miscellaneous Poems on Divers Occasions, Chiefly to Animate and Rouse the Soldiers," printed in 1756. The author is generally alluded to by his surname only, it being taken for granted that his Christian name had been forgotten, but there seems to be no reasonable doubt as to his identity with the Stephen Tilden of that time. By way of preface the author, then seventy years old, offers a candid apology for the little book, which certainly cannot be commended for its literary merits. The first effort is called "The British Lion Roused."

"Hail, great Apollo, guide my feeble pen,  
To rouse the august lion from his den,  
Exciting vengeance on the worst of men.

"Rouse, British Lion, from thy soft repose,  
And take revenge upon the worst of foes,  
Who try to wring and haul you by the nose."

After such an invocation the reader should be prepared for almost anything, even to bear with equanimity the oburgation, —

“Cease, liquid mountains of the foaming flood,  
And tinge the billows with the Gallic blood,  
A faithful drubbing to their future good.

“Bury their squadrons ill in watery tombs,  
And when the news unto Versailles it comes  
Let Lewis swear by Gar and gnaw his thumbs.”

In similar strains he sings of “Braddock’s Defeat,” “The English Soldiers Encouraged,” and “The Soldiers Reproved for Reflecting upon One Another.”

In strong contrast with the modesty and crude simplicity of Tilden are the bellicose vaporings of John Maylem. The latter seems to have aspired to be recognized as above all things the battle bard of the anti-Gallic soldiery. He wrote under the *nom de guerre* of “Philo-Bellum,” and inflicted upon his countrymen, in 1758, something called “The Conquest of Louisbourg, a Poem,” and in the same year something else called “Gallic Perfidy, a Poem.” In the former of these the following extraordinary incident is related as occurring at the siege of Louisbourg:—

“When Amherst there, like Peleus’ mighty son,  
Dreadful in arms and Tyrian purple shone,  
Engaging here in martial order stood  
Fierce as Alcides or the Scythian God,  
Till thundering Mars no more the sight could bear,  
Turn’d pale with envy, and let drop his spear,  
And flame all flaming, from the imperial car,  
Hail’d him sole rival of the God of war.”

Maylem is said to have been somewhat addicted to the “flowing bowl.” His rantings certainly have the effect of having been inspired by some other liquid

than that from the fountain of Hippocrene. One of the post-Revolutionary poets has given us the couplet:—

“Such warmth of fancy once a Maylem fired  
Untaught he sang, by all the muse inspired,”

—a rather equivocal compliment to Harvard College, from which Maylem graduated in 1715. This writer adds, by way of explanation:—

“John Maylem was a poet of genius, who lived not many years since. His productions bear every mark of a deficient education; but his genius rose superior to every inconvenience, and he remains a shining example of the Horatian maxim, ‘*poeta nascitur non fit*.’”

George Cockings, of New Hampshire, was another battle bard of the period, whose name has survived his works. He was both an epic and a dramatic writer. He seems to have achieved a certain sort of success, for his poem on the war in Newfoundland, written in 1758, appears to have passed through several editions. At least the fourth edition was published in London in or before 1766.

Probably the best-known writer of war verse of this period is Dr. Benjamin Young Prime, the ancestor of a line of distinguished scholars and authors who have rendered honorable service to our literature. Dr. Prime was born at Huntington, Long Island, December 20, 1733, and died there in October, 1791. He came of pure New England stock that had been American for three generations. After graduating at Princeton in 1751, he began the study of medicine. Foreign travel and study, including a course at the University of Leyden, combined to render him one of the most cultured Americans of his time. He was a distinguished linguist, writing fluently in several languages,



ancient and modern. His best-known productions were written in the spirit of the Revolutionary era; but for the present he is entitled to mention as the author of "The Patriot Muse, or Poems on some of the Principal Events of the Late War, together with a Poem on the Peace, *Vincit amor patriæ*; by an American Gentleman." This was published in London in 1764, and contains a number of pieces inspired by the colonial wars. His tribute to Wolfe, which has been frequently reprinted, has some lines which show the practised hand of a scholar.

With the exception of Dr. Prime's poems, the best war pieces were fugitive stanzas published anonymously in the journals of the day. Of these, the best-known are the "Song of Braddock's Men," —

"To arms! to arms! my jolly grenadiers!"

and the lines on the death of Wolfe, beginning:—

"Thy merits, Wolfe, transcend all human praise,  
The breathing marble or the muses' lays."

Many of the songs and ballads of the French and English war, like "The Tenth Regiment's March to Quebec," and Edward Botwood's "Hot Stuff," continued favorites with the English soldiers, and in later years were appropriated by the Tory side, the anti-Gallic feeling being transferred to hostility against the rebellious Continentals.

At the accession of George III. (1761) colonial loyalty expended itself in a series of literary pyrotechnics, the brilliancy of which was as brief as it was bewildering. The death of one George and the accession of another furnished the faculty and alumni of Harvard the inspiration to express colonial sentiment in most approved classic style. To commemorate an event of

such importance to the English people, the resources of the English language were evidently insufficient. The Greek and Latin tongues were invoked, and odes in which pedantry vied with sycophancy were addressed in honor of the living and the dead. These combined efforts were sumptuously bound in a quarto volume entitled "*Pietas et Gratulatio Collegii Cantabrigiensis apud Novanglos.*" The work has ever since been regarded as the acme of colonial scholarship. It was duly forwarded to His Majesty, who appears to have treated it in much the same spirit as he displayed toward later and more important communications from his American subjects. So much earnest labor and fervid adulation in three languages would seem to be deserving of something more than the silent contempt which the learned contributors received for their pains. The scholarship shown in the work is of higher order than the poetry. It is a conglomeration of fulsome flattery which appears grotesque enough, when viewed through the perspective of the years immediately following. The deceased George is, of course, portrayed as an impersonation of all the heroic virtues, compared with whom the Cæsars and Alexanders of antiquity are unworthy to be named.

In all the thirty-one poems — three in Greek, twelve in English, and sixteen in Latin — there is hardly an original thought. The whole production betrays a spirit of obsequious insincerity in most conventional form. The only evidence that the young king ever read the book is the fact that not long after its appearance His Majesty began to show signs of insanity.

The accession of George III. marked the turning point in our literary as well as political history. For the most part the verse of the next three decades is

political, displaying through the different gradations of devoted loyalty, timid appeals, earnest protests, open revolution, and finally national independence, the transfer of allegiance from king to native land.

Hitherto the spirit of American song has been but a feeble reflection of its prototype in the motherland. The most powerful minds in American literature during colonial times were for the most part occupied with theology; during the Revolution and the years immediately following, with war, politics, and statesmanship. The writings in these departments of literature will show more force and vigor, more strength of imagination, more true poetic inspiration, than many of the popular verses of the period. Yet in spite of the galling restraints of Puritan bigotry and arrogance, of Quaker primness and asceticism, of Southern prejudice and feudalism, the spirit of song, though caged and fettered, could not be entirely suppressed. That it should have existed at all and found utterance, even though lacking in finer melodies, is only another evidence that, in spite of all logic, the heart is as potent as the intellect in influencing men's actions.

The gradual transition of the American people from the condition of "free and loyal subjects" to that of free and independent citizens is plainly to be traced in our literature. Not the least potent in stirring the hearts and consciences of the people was the spirit of song. Poetry, as the first-born of the arts, gave her aid to the cause of liberty, and was often welcomed where logical arguments would have been wasted. During the decade immediately preceding 1776, the spirit of patriotic verse will be found to be that of loyalty, but loyalty subordinate to liberty. As in the written prose and spoken eloquence of the time, the

patriotic resentment is aroused by the denial of rights which the colonists claimed as free-born English subjects.

When David Garrick composed his popular song "Hearts of Oak," he little dreamed of the effect it would have far across the sea. Yet it was by the tune of that song that thousands of our early patriots were inspired and thrilled into unison with the American cause. All over the colonies in city street and village meetings, in broadside sheets and newspaper columns, it became as familiar as are any of our national airs to us to-day.

It was, as we have seen, in the colony of Virginia that the first literary work of importance in America was composed. Fifty years later, in the same colony, perished as our first martyr in the cause of popular rights, he who signed himself "General by consent of the people." Ninety years after Bacon's death, ten years before the Declaration of Independence was written, came from the same province the first poetical tribute showing the awakening American spirit. The pride of the Old Dominion is in her warriors, statesmen, and orators, rather than in her writers of national fame. Yet it was the future "Mother of Presidents" and parent of imperial states that was first in the field with verse to inspire loyalty to native land.

The composition referred to had, perhaps, little influence on the development of our national literature, but as no force is ever entirely wasted, so this patriotic ballad, to the air "Hearts of Oak," doubtless had its effect in stimulating the American spirit, and contributing to the cause of nationalism. It appeared in "The Virginia Gazette," May 2, 1766.

A song to the same tune, and known as "The Patriot's Appeal," was printed in "The Pennsylvania Chronicle" at Philadelphia on the significant date of July 4, 1766. It was composed by John Dickinson, of Delaware, who wrote concerning it:—

"I hope my good intentions will produce pardon with those I wish to please, for the boldness of my numbers. My worthy friend, Dr. Arthur Lee, a gentleman of distinguished family, abilities, and patriotism in Virginia, composed eight lines of it. Cardinal De Retz always enforced his political operations by songs. I wish our attempt may be useful."

In one stanza will be noticed the origin of a sentiment destined to become a national watchword:—

"Then join hand in hand, brave Americans all,  
By uniting we stand, by dividing we fall;  
In so righteous a cause, we may hope to succeed,  
For Heaven approves every generous deed."

This song became extremely popular, and was printed in widely scattered journals throughout the colonies. Within a few months "it appeared," says the historian, "as a ballad sheet set to the majestic air of 'Hearts of Oak,' and was sung in the streets of Boston and the villages of New England by all the sons of freedom, who promised themselves that all ages would applaud their courage."

Dickinson's song paid the penalty of its popularity in being parodied by the Tories. That this parody, weak as it was, had some effect, is evinced by the fact that it in turn was parodied in the now famous "Massachusetts Liberty Song." This was probably the most widely circulated ballad of Revolutionary times. It even found its way across the ocean, and was printed in "The St. James Gazette," in November, 1768. So

powerful was it in "moulding the popular mind in favor of union and resistance," that it is still frequently reprinted with the music as it originally appeared in a Boston newspaper. As an echo of an echo it has no claim to originality, but on account of its effect at the time is entitled to mention. In January, 1769, New York followed in the wake of Virginia, Pennsylvania, and Massachusetts, with a similar song in "The New York Journal." Up to and during the war, song writers on both sides continued to ring the changes on this now well-worn tune in verses of varying degrees of merit.

Nearly all the important episodes leading up to the Revolution were duly celebrated in the verse of the period. The Stamp Act inspired several effusions of which Dr. Prime's "Song for the Sons of Liberty in New York" is probably the best.

The subject of tea naturally appears in numerous ballads. Of these a good specimen is the one originally printed in "The Pennsylvania Packet" in 1773. It was entitled "A New Song to the Plaintive Tune of Hosier's Ghost," but is too long for insertion here. Another noteworthy ballad, for whose preservation we are indebted to Mr. Moore, is "Liberty's Call." It was written in 1775 by John Mason, though it has been attributed to Jeremiah Sargent as well as to Francis Hopkinson. The spirit is notably American in the welcome it extends to the oppressed of other lands.

It is not in the songs and ballads alone that the awakening spirit is discernible. In the more sustained efforts of scholarly verse-writers the same feeling is manifest. "The Prospective Greatness of America" was a favorite theme with young poets like Trumbull, Freneau, and Brackenridge.

It was in 1774, while Mr. Gulian Verplanck of New York was in England, that he wrote his celebrated "Prophecy."

"Hail happy Britain, Freedom blest retreat,  
Great is thy power, thy wealth, thy glory great,  
But wealth and power have no immortal day  
For all things ripen only to decay.  
And when that time arrives, the lot of all,  
When Britain's glory, power and wealth shall fall;  
Then shall thy sons by Fate's unchanged decree  
In other worlds another Britain see,  
And what thou art, America shall be."

As the breach with the mother country continued to widen, the spirit of our poetic verse naturally increased in bitterness. The respect for the king rapidly changed to quite a different feeling as the Revolution culminated toward independence. Contemporary verse inspired by the Declaration was in no wise remarkable. The strains of "high-born rebel melody" that appeared in the "Freeman's Journal" shortly before the Declaration was signed, are smooth and rhythmical, but Jonathan M. Sewall's lines on the subject are altogether unworthy of the author.

With the formal separation from the mother country we take leave of the fugitive verse of the period. Nationalism has become an established fact, and from the chaotic condition of our early literature a new order will soon arise, feeble at first, but growing with our national growth. Henceforward we shall direct attention to the development of our national poetry as evidenced in the works of recognized poets. In this chapter we have for the most part confined ourselves to the simple ballads of the people, rather than to the efforts of professional writers. These folk songs were composed contemporaneously with the events or while

the feelings inspired by those events were still uppermost in men's minds. All through the Revolution every important triumph of American arms was hailed with a pæan of joy. American leaders were extolled in all manner of eulogistic verse, while the Tory generals were patriotically ridiculed and lampooned.

It is easy enough to scorn the crudeness and even coarseness of many of these productions. Their claims to literary beauty are the slightest. Yet the song and ballad literature of the early years of the Revolution occupies a much more important place relatively than does the same class of literature in our later wars. This, I repeat, is not at all on account of its intrinsic merit, but is due to its influence in forming and reflecting public opinion, as well as to the comparative meagreness of the more ambitious poetic literature of the time. Regarding the matter simply from a literary point of view, it is almost marvellous to us that our forefathers could be thrilled by such effusions, as it will doubtless be to our own descendants that millions of hearts could be aroused to enthusiasm by such songs as "When this Cruel War is Over," and other sickly ballads that were popular on both sides during our Civil War.

As we leave the arid period of our literature, we may observe the forces at work that will in time quicken the long barren soil, until the once literary desert is made to bloom with a growth capable of depending solely upon its inherent excellence to command respect and admiration.



## CHAPTER V

### *FRENEAU AND THE CONNECTICUT CHOIR*

1765-1815

THE poetry of the Revolution and of the years immediately following is to-day for the most part unreadable. That of a more ambitious character, the now forgotten epics and dramas, was of the turgid, pathetic sort so irritating to modern readers. True imagination, as well as creative faculty, was entirely lacking. The spirit of nature was deliberately sacrificed to an artificial straining for effect fatal to literary art. There is but one verse writer of that period whose works, as literature, are at all worthy of consideration. The transient writings of this author were favorites with the masses, but his more meritorious work was, even in the minds of the more cultivated, totally obscured by the soaring heroics of the Connecticut singers. The demand was supposed to be for pretentious epics like "The Columbiad" and "The Conquest of Canaan." Simple lyrics breathing the spirit of the woodlands could attract no notice. The wild honeysuckle had no place among these artificial flowers which betrayed their mechanism in every part.

The most prolific poet of the Revolutionary era was unquestionably Philip Freneau. He is still frequently referred to as "the laureate of the Revolution," as though his patriotic verse constituted his sole claim

to distinction. Though his contemporaries failed to realize it, Freneau's best work was of a different order. His songs and satires kept him prominently before the public, who cared little for the artistic value of his performance, while his imaginative works were overlooked. This young poet, discarding conventional types, was able to look into his own heart and write, to tell of Nature as he found her, and not as others had described, and to sing with clear notes the songs of freedom without rhetorical fustian. He did not deliberately set himself to work to produce a new national poetry, but simply gave utterance to the American spirit that animated his whole life. He sang because it was natural for him to do so, and his topics were those with which he was most familiar. Much that he wrote was perishable, but much also was the kind to endure. His lifetime from 1752 to 1832 covered an important era in our literary history. During that period many of the stars in the poetical firmament of our colonial period had passed completely out of sight and memory. When Freneau was born the renegade American, James Ralph, had not yet closed his adventurous career; Byles and Green were in the flush of their fame. At the time of Freneau's death Bryant had an established reputation. Longfellow, Whittier, Holmes, Emerson, and Poe had already entered upon the scene. Lowell and Whitman were lads of thirteen.

The circumstances of our Revolutionary War offered abundant opportunity for satire, and Freneau doubtless made the most of it. His effusions lacked the broad, farcical humor of Trumbull's "McFingal," and still more the obvious exalted moral purpose that inspired the "Biglow Papers" of a later age. Yet as practi-

cally the first in the field, they are entitled to all the credit due to pioneer achievement.

I do not know on what authority Professor John Nichol bases his statement that Freneau was a soldier in the American army. Our poet sang of arms, but his weapon was the pen. He wrote political articles and stirring appeals in both prose and verse, but there his activity ceased. During the Revolution he was frequently out of the country, and made several sea voyages. His title of captain is due to his nautical career and not to any military service. In 1776 he made a voyage to the West Indies, which is commemorated in several of his poems, notably "The Jamaica Funeral" and "The Beauties of Santa Cruz."

Had Freneau lived and written in the next generation he would undoubtedly have been an Abolitionist, staunch Democrat though he was. When living in New Jersey he freed his own slaves and took care of those unable to provide for themselves. Like a later poet, whom he somewhat resembles in his detestation of all moral and political despotism, he did not scruple to express in prose and verse his condemnation of slavery. In his poem on Santa Cruz he devotes several stanzas to this subject, and in speaking of the slave is moved to the indignant utterance:—

"Curs'd be the ship that brought him o'er the main,  
And curs'd the hands that from his country tore,  
May she be stranded ne'er to float again,  
May they be shipwrecked on some hostile shore."

In his lines to Sir Toby, and on emigration to America, he again expresses his sentiments without reservation. He also uses his verse to convey his disapproval of imprisoning for debt.

His "Cantos from a Prison Ship" is the most in-

tensely American narrative poem in theme and treatment that up to that time had been written. Its descriptions are given with vigor and simplicity, not the less interesting on account of their historical correctness. That it has its faults cannot be denied. That he perhaps allows his fancy sometimes to give a too vivid coloring may also be admitted, for it is unreasonable to suppose that a person of his ardent temperament should be able to give an unimpassioned chronicle of those shocking brutalities.

Naturally the enthusiasm aroused by Freneau's war poems waned with the occasions that inspired them. No poet can expect a place with the immortals who depends upon passing events for the impressions created by his verse. His best work, however, was not of a transitory character. One of the qualities which places Freneau easily first among his contemporary poets of America is his appreciation of nature. There is a delicate sentiment in some of his simpler poems that stamps them with the signet of pure poetry. This is especially noticeable in little lyrics like "The Honey Bee," which Stedman declares to be worthy of a Landor, or the "Wild Honeysuckle," whose brief span of existence exemplifies

"The frail duration of a flower,"

and the less familiar "May to April."

Freneau was our first poet who properly interpreted the Indian character. His Indian poems are all creditable. There are only about a half a dozen of these lyrics, but they show that their author appreciated the simple love of nature displayed by the early Indians, and that he fully understood the obstacles in the way of civilizing them. This is well exemplified in the

little poem, "The Indian Student." As a work of art, however, that is not to be compared with "The Dying Indian," with its picturesque opening:—

"On yonder lake I spread the sail no more,  
Vigor and youth and active days are past;  
Relentless demons urge me to that shore  
On whose black forests all the dead are cast."

But the most interesting of all Freneau's poems of this class is his "Indian Burying Ground." This first appeared in his volume of "Miscellaneous Works," published in 1788, and was slightly changed in the edition of 1795. It at once suggests a parallelism with Schiller's "Indian Death Dirge," which Goethe pronounced to be one of the best ballads written by Schiller, and which, apparently, was not written until after 1793. Both poems are easily accessible to the general reader, the one in Bulwer Lytton's excellent translation and the other in almost any anthology of American verse. The subject is suggested by the custom of burying the Indian in a sitting posture, with his wampum, images, and weapons by his side. Both lyrics undoubtedly originated in the same source, Carver's "Travels Through North America" (1778). But Carver simply mentions the fact with no attempt at rhetorical embellishment. The tone and purpose assumed by the famous German and the obscure American, the thoughts and general treatment, are so similar that the coincidence is startling. It may be added that Freneau's poem loses nothing by comparison with the later effort of Schiller. It is this lyric of Freneau's, as the reader will recollect, that contains the lines, —

"The hunter still the deer pursues,  
The hunter and the deer — a shade,"

which Campbell compliments by borrowing for his poem, "O'Connor's Child." Literary historians have frequently commented on this manifest appropriation by Campbell, as well as Scott's conversion to his own use in "Marmion" of a line in Freneau's poem on Eutaw Springs.

To accuse creative poets like Scott and Campbell of plagiarizing from Freneau would be absurd. The coincidences simply prove that both these writers had read Freneau and been deeply impressed by him. There are plenty of such instances of "unconscious cerebration" in literary history. No such defence, however, can be urged in the case of Freneau's "Death Song of a Cherokee Indian." This appears in Carey's "American Museum" for January, 1787. When an English lady, Mrs. Anne Hunter, published her poems in 1806, this piece appeared in the volume as her own composition, almost word for word as Freneau had written it, except that some slight verbal changes and transpositions were made in the second and third stanzas. It would be a stretch of courtesy to call such an effort the result of "unconscious cerebration" on the part of that gifted lady. Professor John Nichol says that these lines "have been claimed by Mrs. Edgeworth for Mrs. Hunter, but I believe them to be Freneau's. Henry Clay in his great speech on the Seminole war of 1819 so quotes them, and he ought to have known the authorship. They in any case are the keynote of the last words of the Oneida chief in Campbell's 'Gertrude of Wyoming.'"

The reference to Henry Clay's speech is, I fear, another instance of hasty statement on the part of this distinguished Scotch critic. Clay does not mention Freneau. What he did say was: "The poet evinced

a profound knowledge of the Indian character when he put into the mouth of a son of a distinguished chief about to be led to the stake and tortured by a victorious enemy, the words:—

“Begin, ye tormentors, your threats are in vain;  
The son of Alknomook will never complain.”

Singularly enough his spelling of Alknomook is not that of Freneau but of Mrs. Hunter. Duyckinck commits a still graver error in stating that the poem appears *under Freneau's name* in the first volume of the “American Museum.” It appears on a different page from the one mentioned, with no name whatever attached, but under the general heading, “Select Poetry, Ancient and Modern.”

Though both Duyckinck and Nichol fail in their authorities, there is no reasonable doubt as to Freneau's authorship. The poem was popularly attributed to him during his lifetime, and his rugged honesty, where no question of politics was concerned, would never have allowed him to retain credit to which he was not entitled. Samuel L. Knapp, who had special opportunities for the investigation of all matters relating to our nascent literature, wrote several years before Freneau's death: “Freneau's pieces are very unequal. Some of them were probably thrown off in haste, and others polished with care. The Address to Ferdinand is a very happy effort, and his Indian Death Song has been very much admired.” The “Death Song” is then quoted as it appears anonymously in Carey's “Museum.”

Freneau was a man of affairs rather than a man of letters. His English is not always the purest, and his grammar is occasionally faulty, though he devoted much time to the study of the classics long after leav-

ing college. He wrote a number of translations from French and Latin poets, and a rhymed epistle on the folly of studying the dead languages. He delighted to show his familiarity with what he terms "Latin lore and heathen Greek," and has given us some indifferent verses on "The Prayer of Orpheus," "The Monument of Phaon," "The Pyramids of Egypt," "Quintilian to Lycidas," and "Mars and Venus." That he was not exempt from the prevalent cloying contagion of Della Cruscanism may be inferred from such titles as "Philander and Lavinia," "Palemon to Lavinia," "On Amanda's Singing Bird," "Amanda's Complaint," "Philander to Amanda," "To Clarissa," "To Cynthia," and the like. Bluff sea captain that he is, and not unfamiliar with grim-visaged war, he is not above devoting himself to "the lascivious pleasing of the lute."

Among his minor poems showing a graceful touch should be classed his "Ode to Fancy" and "Fancy's Ramble." He has left us one imaginative poem, however, far nobler than many on which much greater reputations have been based. "The House of Night, a Vision," clearly outranks all efforts of the imagination which our early literature produced. It has its faults, glaring defects, with lines and even whole stanzas that might have been improved or omitted. Yet, for an American production at that period, it is strikingly original in spite of occasional echoes of Pope and Gray. It was written in 1776, and first published in the "United States Magazine" in 1779. It then consisted of seventy-three stanzas. When published in the first edition of the author's poems it was enlarged to one hundred and thirty-six stanzas. It is from that edition that the extracts to follow are taken.



Because this is the first long poem in our literature showing any degree of creative power, and because it is now almost entirely unknown to the readers of verse, it has been deemed essential to refer to it at some length. In one of his early prose essays Freneau remarks: "There are few writers of books in this New World, and amongst these very few that deal in works of imagination, and, I am sorry to say, fewer still that have any success attending their lucubrations." It was perhaps owing to the popular indifference to his most creditable "work of the imagination" that its author saw fit to cut it down to a meaningless fragment of twenty-one stanzas, under the title of "The Vision of the Night," in the revised edition of 1795. This poem alone, as published in the first volume, is sufficient to show what its author might have accomplished by devoting himself to a purely literary career.

The theme is unique. It represents Death as conquered and lying on his bed of pain. The scene is a palace at midnight, the house of Cleon, whose young bride has but recently been claimed as one of Death's victims. In a spirit of Christian heroism Cleon has given shelter to his enemy, furnishing physicians and attendance to alleviate his misery. The dreamer roams at midnight over a plain "where murmuring streams and mingling rivers flow," through flowerless meads and blighted fields, whose trees are bare and lifeless.

"Dark was the sky, and not one friendly star  
Shone from the zenith or horizon clear,  
Mist sat upon the woods and darkness rode  
In her black chariot with a wild career.

"Rude from the wide extended Chesapeake  
I heard the winds the dashing waves assail,  
And saw from far by picturing fancy form'd  
The black ship moving through the noisy gale."

At length, "by chance and guardian fancy led," he reaches a noble dome, from whose upper windows flamed lights presaging mirth and hospitality. This is only a delusion, for amid the most lugubrious surroundings he hears men's voices discoursing on death, coffins, shrouds, and horrors of the tomb. Passing by this, he comes upon a scene whose unearthly appearance could not have been more vividly depicted by Poe himself.

"Then up three winding stairs my feet were brought,  
To a high chamber, hung with mourning sad,  
The unsnuff'd candles glar'd with visage dim,  
Midst grief in ecstasy of woe run mad."

The stranger seeks to soothe Death's dying agonies, fetching cold spring water for his torturing thirst, and ministering to him chosen medicines, compounded of "dead men's bones and bitter roots," but all to no purpose. When Death realizes that he is indeed lost, he sends for the undertaker and orders his coffin built doubly strong, so as to cheat old Satan, late his trusty friend. The undertaker, in spite of past obligations, insists upon being paid in advance, a demand which elicits a bitter retort. Upon the withdrawal of the "wood-mechanic," Death describes the weird surroundings of the place destined to be his tomb, and gives instructions regarding his epitaph. This epitaph, designed to show that Death himself is not above vanity and would be remembered with honor, is simply a boastful statement of his conquests for the past six thousand years. Scarce has Death concluded his charge, when a terrific storm breaks forth, "as though all music were to breathe its last."

The poem ends with a few moral reflections on life

and death, some of the concluding strains being not unworthy the author of "Thanatopsis."

"Death is no more than one unceasing change.  
New forms arise while other forms decay,  
Yet all is life throughout creation's range. . . .

"True to itself the immortal soul remains,  
And seeks new mansions in the starry sphere.

"When nature bids thee from the world retire,  
With joy thy lodging leave, a sated guest,  
In Paradise, the land of thy desire,  
Existing always, always to be blest."

Freneau disliked the Puritans as much as Irving did, and enjoyed giving them an occasional thrust. His best humorous poem probably is his "Sketches of American History." No one can question Freneau's patriotism, and perhaps no other popular poet of that time could have ventured to satirize the early American colonists. Whatever these "sketches" may lack in poetic quality, they at any rate offer a refreshing contrast to the well-meant but aggressive patriotism of that day. He clearly anticipates Diedrich Knickerbocker in his humorous arraignment of the Puritans. In these collections may be found the revolutionary prototypes of a class of idyllic ballads familiar enough in our later literature. Of these may be mentioned "The Ruined Country Inn," "The Deserted Farm House," and "The Desolate Academy," the last a crude anticipation of Whittier's "In School Days." "The Dull Moralist" is suggestive of Dr. Holmes' "Moral Bully," though as far below it in artistic spirit as is Freneau's poem "The Catydid" below the Autocrat's lines to the same insect.

There is something of Whittier in Freneau's patriotism and detestation of all kinds of tyranny, something

of Bryant in love and interpretation of nature, something of Longfellow in discerning treatment of Indian myths, something of Poe in the loftier imaginative strains, and something of Holmes and Lowell in cutting satire. A writer who, while lacking the depth of thought and intellectual vigor of any one of these, could still foreshadow something of the genius of our greatest singers, would certainly seem entitled to the designation of our earliest national poet.

Freneau's ballads might do well enough for the common soldier, but were not at all suited to the scholastic taste of the period. His simple lyrics were entirely too modest to satisfy the soaring ambition of certain aspirants. Besides, some of his poems betrayed imagination, and the imaginative faculty was the last thing to be endured by this "tuneful brotherhood."

During the half century following the year 1761 the literary prestige of Massachusetts underwent a temporary eclipse. Whatever the cause, immediately after the appearance of "*Pietas et Gratulatio*," the Massachusetts Muse seems to have labored under a literary paralysis, lasting until the arrival of a new generation. The sceptre passed from Harvard to Yale as the academic centre of American poetry. The new-born Pegasus found his grazing ground in Connecticut, with an occasional excursion into the Middle States. Scattered singers, it is true, appeared in the Old Bay State, but their voices were nearly drowned in the swelling strains of a remarkable chorus that drew attention by its sonorous, if not melodious, utterances. The Connecticut singers were fully determined to show the world what American poetry should be.

The literary careers of several members of the choir began before the Revolution, and ended in the early

years of the nineteenth century. These writers lived through the stirring scenes that attended the birth throes of a nation, and some by the sword and all by the pen rendered service to their native land. They were great in many things, whatever may be thought of their verse-making. But it was as poets that they, and their friends for them, appealed to mankind, and it is in that capacity that they are to be judges. Numerically, at least, the Muses were fitly represented by this band. They were nine in number, consisting of Timothy and Theodore Dwight, Joel Barlow, David Humphreys, John Trumbull, Lemuel Hopkins, Richard Alsop, Elihu H. Smith, and M. F. Coggsell. As one star differs from another in glory, it would be unreasonable to expect them all to shine with equal effulgence. Theodore Dwight, Smith, Coggsell, and Hopkins could hardly claim the degree of brilliancy displayed by Timothy Dwight, Barlow, Humphreys, Trumbull, and Alsop. In fact, the lesser luminaries shone almost entirely by reflected light. Their poetic reputation is due in great measure to their association with others. The members of this group never tire of impressing upon the world each other's greatness. If we are to take their estimates of each other, certainly never since the morning stars sang together has there been such a galaxy of singers.

After the overwhelming testimony to the greatness of these bards, it is with many misgivings that we venture a contemplation of their merits. No set of men ever applied themselves so industriously to the manufacture of poetic material. If they did not succeed in convincing posterity and the world in general that they were the genuine high priests of native American Apollo, it was not through lack of effort.

The Reverend Timothy Dwight (1752-1817) was a fit type of the best American citizenship of his day. As the grandson of Jonathan Edwards, he worthily preserved the theological traditions of his family. He graduated at Yale in the class of 1769, and in 1795 was called to the presidency of his college, a position which he filled with distinction until his death. Besides his poetical writings, he was author of a five-volume work on theology. One of his hymns,

"I love thy kingdom, Lord,  
The house of thine abode,"

is still sung in the churches. His longest metrical work, "The Conquest of Canaan," is one for whose appearance there was not the slightest excuse. His friends have urged in its extenuation that it was written when its author was but twenty years of age, and that therefore it must not be judged by the same canons of criticism that are applied to more mature works. But it should be remembered that it was not published until ten years after it was written, a period long enough for the author to correct the follies of his callow youth. What was an ordinary production in a youth of twenty, was execrable in a man of thirty.

"The Conquest of Canaan" is a long, tedious effort, extending through eleven books, "to represent such manners as are removed from the peculiarities of any age or country, and might belong to the amiable and virtuous of any period, elevated without design, refined without ceremony, elegant without fashion, and agreeable because they are ornamented with sincerity, dignity, and religion." The versification is fair, but monotonous, and there is no unity of design. The author was willing to rest his reputation as a poet on

this work, which in all sincerity he believed to be as meritorious as the *Iliad* or *Æneid*. There is nothing very original or pleasing in the whole performance. Though dealing with wars of the Israelites, incidents of our own Revolution, as the death of Warren, are introduced, and the din and roar of contending hosts compared to Niagara Falls.

The adulation of his brother bards availed little in rescuing from oblivion this ponderous production. One of our foremost men of letters of that day, Dr. Dennie, made special efforts to popularize the "Great epic," but met with no success.

"The Triumph of Infidelity" (1788) is a versified theological treatise, directed against the current infidelity, and contains some well-expressed satire upon the "smooth divine." "Greenfield Hill" (1794) was a little more successful. It is true there was more preaching than poetry in it, but it dealt in home themes, and was a decided advance on its predecessors. Its didacticism was something formidable, as was to be expected.

Dr. Dwight was certainly a strong man in his day. As patriot, theologian, educator, controversialist, and citizen, if not as a poet, he was truly and eminently great. The earliest known use of the word "Columbia" as applied to America occurs in his song "Columbia, Columbia, to Glory arise," written while a chaplain in the American army.

Younger by two years than Dr. Dwight was his associate and rival in epic fields, Joel Barlow (1754-1812). The latter graduated at Yale in 1778, when he delivered his poem "The Prospect of Peace." Here was begun his lifelong acquaintance with Dwight, Trumbull, and Humphreys, themselves all Yale graduates.

Barlow does not seem to have been in the least adapted to theology, though he did write a few hymns. But army chaplains were in great demand then. So in 1780, after a course of six weeks' study, he branched out as a full-fledged parson. "I do not know," he wrote, "whether I shall do more for the cause in the capacity of chaplain, than I would in that of poet: I have great faith in the influence of songs; and I shall continue, while fulfilling the duties of my appointment, to write one now and then, and to encourage the taste for them, which I find in the camp. One good song is worth a dozen addresses or proclamations." He retained his clerical position for about three years, abandoning it when the close of the war dispensed with the necessity for his office. In 1785 a reminiscence of his theological period appeared in the shape of a book published at Hartford, entitled "Dr. Watts' Imitation of the Psalms of David, corrected and enlarged by Joel Barlow, to which is added a collection of Hymns." The rendition of the one hundred and thirty-seventh Psalm was the work of Barlow, and retained its admirers for a century.

Turning editor, he assumed charge of the "American Mercury" at Hartford, at the same time pursuing the study of law, and was admitted to the bar in 1786. It was during this period that he became associated with the little band long known as the "Hartford Wits."

That the "Vision of Columbus" was a success no one in these days would claim, chiefly because few ever read it far enough to pass a critical judgment on it, and, secondly, because the violations of good taste and of literary propriety are so glaring as to overshadow what little merit it really possessed. It found



plenty of contemporary admirers, however, and met with sufficient encouragement to delude the author in after years to inflate it far beyond its original limits when it was remodelled in the form of "The Columbiad." It would be a sheer waste of effort to point out the changes. Barlow preferred to let his earlier production be forgotten, and to rest his fame on the more ambitious epic.

The publication of "The Vision" in this country as well as in London and Paris secured a certain degree of fame for its author. He was soon after appointed foreign agent of the Scioto Land Company, a swindling concern, though Barlow himself was innocent of its fraudulent character. He resigned his position when he learned the truth after his arrival in Europe. He remained abroad after severing his connection with the land company, dividing most of his time between London and Paris, being on intimate terms with many of the most eminent men in both cities. While in London in 1791-92 he undertook the publication of his "Advice to the Privileged Orders." The privileged orders showed their appreciation of his advice by procuring its proscription by the British government. The work was bitterly assailed by Burke, whom Barlow attacked in his furious diatribe, "The Conspiracy of Kings," published in February, 1792, in which his animosity finds vent in such expressions as "Burke's mad foam," "Oh Burke, degenerate slave!" and "Burke leads you wrong, the world is not his own."

The one great characteristic of Barlow, to which he owed his successes, was undoubtedly his sublime audacity. The self-assurance which sent him into the ranks of the scholarly New England clergy after a

training of six weeks, carried him through most trying ordeals. The same spirit which led the once obscure chaplain of the Revolutionary army to give, in the very stronghold of English aristocracy, pointed advice to the privileged classes, and to measure swords with Burke himself; afterward to beard the piratical Dey of Algiers in his lair and succeed in rescuing a number of his countrymen from chains; and in the last days of his life to contend for American interests with the most conspicuous figure of his age, — led him to try his powers in a very different field. He essayed to supplant the greatest bards of antiquity, and his audacity, taking the form of colossal self-conceit, succeeded only in making his name memorable as a by-word in connection with literary failures.

The great work by which Barlow expected to transmit his name through the ages was, it is needless to say, his epic, "The Columbiad," which came to light in 1807. He was evidently not satisfied with ridding the world of sultans, kings, czars, and emperors, those "crested reptiles," as he terms them in his "Conspiracy of Kings." He must now turn his hand against the monarchs of song. The moral tendency of the *Æneid* he declared to be pernicious. "Homer's existence was one of the signal misfortunes of mankind," he writes in his preface to "The Columbiad." Having thus effectually disposed of the father of Greek poetry, he cheerfully strikes his own lyre and begins. The imprisoned Columbus is represented as deliberating over his unhappy fate and bewailing the world's ingratitude.

"Thus mourned the hapless man. A thundering sound  
Rolled through the shuddering wall, and shook the ground,

O'er all the dungeon, where black arches bend,  
The roofs unfold, and streams of light descend.  
The growing splendor fills the astonished room,  
And gales ethereal breathe a glad perfume."

The occasion of this strange manifestation is the visit of Hesper, the genius of the western world, under whose magical guidance Columbus is led up a "heaven-illuminated road," and from the clear summit is treated to a panoramic view of the results of his discoveries. To call such a thing an epic is a perversion of terms. It is a high-strung geographical, historical, political, and philosophical disquisition, as uninteresting and unpoetic as Madame Anne Bradstreet's disquisition on the four monarchies. A brief view is presented of the state of Europe during the Middle Ages, followed by a more extended description of the American discoveries, the conquests of Mexico and Peru, the colonization of North America, the colonial trials, and the Revolutionary war. Events still fresh in men's minds, besides some entirely fictitious, and characters still living, are introduced. Complimentary notices are bestowed upon the author's fellow poets of Connecticut, the Revolutionary heroes, and the sages and statesmen of his time. It is a sort of literary dragnet, designed to catch anything that suggests itself to his brain. Among other pleasant things, Hesper discloses the extent of internal improvements that are to grace the land, though his gift of prophecy unfortunately falls short of anything beyond the age of canals as a medium of interstate commerce. The whole ends with a vision of the glories yet to be, when the victories of peace shall eclipse those of war, and the dreams of Utopia shall become an actuality.

It is creditable to the tastes of the poet's country-

men that they refused to recognize any merit in the book, in spite of its strained patriotism. In America, the "epic" was a failure, though it received some notices, flattering as well as adverse, from British critics. Barlow ascribed its failure to political causes, he being a Democrat, and leaders of literary opinion presumably belonging to the opposition, just as Dr. Dwight attributed the failure of his pietistic epic to the prevalence of infidelity. Both epics sank out of sight, weighted down by their own leaden gravity. "The Columbiad," from beginning to end of its seven thousand three hundred and fifty lines, is insufferably dull. It is the soporific influences of Barlow's Columbian poems, and the utterly depressing effect of Dwight's pointless epic, that give special significance to the delightfully unconscious irony of Humphreys' query, —

"Why sleepest thou, Barlow, child of genius? Why  
Seest thou, blest Dwight, our land in sadness lie?"

Very different from Dwight and Barlow in his aspirations, but more successful in achievement, was Judge John Trumbull (1750-1831). Without attempting to rival the great of antiquity, his genius was the most original of any of the Connecticut choir. His aim perhaps was not the highest, but he displayed an admirable faculty of hitting the mark every time. His chosen field was burlesque, and in it he was master.

Trumbull's career was one of those exceptionable cases of a prolonged life fulfilling the promise of youthful precocity. At five he was studying Greek and Latin, and at seven offered himself for admission to the freshman class at Yale. There is something

almost pathetic in the glimpse a writer gives of this sickly lad of barely seven summers seated on the lap of Dr. Emmons while undergoing examination in the required studies, and coming out triumphant. It was deemed advisable, on account of his extreme youth and poor health, to wait six years. He did not graduate, therefore, until 1767. In 1771 Trumbull and Dwight were appointed tutors at Yale, the former leaving at the end of two years to practise law.

Removing to Boston, Trumbull was caught in the whirl of politics. "The year 1775," he writes, "was a period of terror and dismay. Unconditional submission, or a total rejection of the authority of the crown, presented the only alternative. Every exertion was made by the friends of American liberty to inspire confidence in our cause, to crush the efforts of the Tory party, and to prepare the public mind for the Declaration of Independence." Under such circumstances, at the solicitation of some of his friends in Congress Trumbull wrote the first part of his best-known work, "McFingal," which was immediately published in Philadelphia, and passed through thirty editions, besides enjoying a sort of notoriety in England. The work was not completed until 1782.

The poem is itself one of the best contemporary descriptions of men and manners in the revolutionary times, and for this, if for no other reason, is deserving of commendation. Its satire is stinging, and as one of the patriot forces of the Revolution, its effect can hardly be overestimated. Though in confessed imitation of Butler's "Hudibras," it would not be difficult to find lines in which the disciple has risen above his master. It has been said that the "Tories felt a greater hatred to the poet, who had made them ridiculous, than to the soldier

who destroyed their ranks by hundreds." However that may be, the work received its due share of attention in Europe as well as in America. It was in effect the revolutionary prototype of "The Biglow Papers."

The design of the poem is simple enough. Squire McFingal is the type of the Tory, king-loving New Englander, while Honorius represents the Whig, or patriot, element. The poem is chiefly taken up with the speeches of these two, and the misadventures of the Squire in seeking to antagonize the Yankee mobs.

Nothing was farther from the author's intention than to write a classic. The object of the work was purely political, and it served its purpose. Yet it is the only long poem by any of the Connecticut choir that finds readers to-day. It is also the only work of that band that has furnished popular proverbs, of which the most common is, —

"No man e'er felt the halter draw  
With good opinion of the law :  
Or held in methods orthodox  
His love of justice in the stocks."

"McFingal" found appreciative admirers in France as well as in Great Britain. "I believe," wrote Marquis de Chastellux from Paris in 1784, "that you have rifled every flower which that kind of poetry could offer." After setting forth in detail the requirements of burlesque poetry, the Marquis adds: "These you have happily seized and perfectly complied with, nor do I hesitate to assure you that I prefer it to every work of the kind, even to 'Hudibras,'" and concludes by asking for copies of "McFingal" for distribution in France. The minor poems of Trumbull are patriotic, didactic, and elegiac, with attempts at paraphrase and translation.

Quite as interesting a personality as the three already

mentioned was the warrior poet, Colonel David Humphreys (1753-1818), who graduated at Yale in 1771. At the breaking out of the war he enlisted in the patriot army as captain. He was subsequently on the staff of General Putnam as major, and in 1780 became aide-de-camp to Washington with the rank of colonel. He rendered distinguished services and was a devoted adherent of General Washington. After the Revolution he spent much of his time as a guest at Mount Vernon. Upon his return from Europe in 1786 he was associated with the "Hartford Wits." In 1791 he was sent as first American minister to Lisbon, and in 1797 as minister plenipotentiary to Spain, where he remained until 1802.

All of Humphreys' longer poems are of a patriotic character, with constant allusions to Washington. The personal glimpses given of his chief are of course always interesting, though unfriendly critics might be disposed to question the taste of the writer in so constantly associating his own name with that of his chieftain.

The chief poems of Humphreys are "An Address to the Armies of the United States," "On the Happiness of America," "On the Future Glory of the United States," "On the Love of Country," and "On the Death of General Washington." In the preface to one of his poems he very properly remarks: "To make use of poetry for strengthening patriotism, promoting virtue, and extending happiness is to bring it back to its primitive exalted employment." This is very true, but the similarity of his theme soon grows monotonous and renders continuous reading for pleasure impossible. In spite of his aggressive Americanism, Humphreys did not disdain the arts of the courtier. His "Address to the Armies" is dedicated to the Duke de Rochefoucauld;

his "Industry of the United States," to "His Royal Highness the Prince Regent of Portugal;" and his "Love of Country," to "His Majesty Louis, King of Etruria, Hereditary Prince of Parma, Infant of Spain, &c. &c. &c." The list of subscribers to his poems is headed with "His Catholic Majesty," "Her Catholic Majesty," President Jefferson and ex-President Adams, followed by Duke of Alafoens, Chevalier de Adlerberg, M. de Aguirre and Sons, Don Zenon Alonso, and a host of other more or less distinguished Europeans and Americans.

The first mentioned poem, "The Address," attained a considerable degree of success, was favorably reviewed by English and French critics, and translated into French by the Marquis de Chastellux. The object of the poem was "to inspire our countrymen now in arms, or who may hereafter be called into the field with perseverance, and fortitude, through every species of difficulty and danger, to continue their exertions for the defence of their country, and the preservation of its liberties." The frequent use of such expressions as "Ye martial bands," "Ye gallant youths," "What time proud Albion thundering o'er the waves," "The horrid sounds of war," etc., becomes tiresome. The poem on "The Happiness of America" had the good fortune to pass through ten editions. Written with the patriotic purpose of stimulating and encouraging the people during the trying times that immediately succeeded the Revolution, it includes a rhymed version of Washington's "Farewell Address," from which the author proceeds to discuss the happiness of Americans as a free and agricultural people, the pleasures of peace succeeding the horrors of war, the beauties of American domestic life, and the advantages of agriculture and commerce. An



unoffending mediocrity is the chief characteristic of Humphreys' patriotic poems.

Richard Alsop (1761-1815) was a student, but not a graduate of Yale. He was a man of letters simply, whose fame rests entirely on his written works. Mr. Elihu H. Smith, himself one of "the tuneful brotherhood," refers to him as "Mr. Alsop, a poet, who, were his ambition equal to his talents, would appear among the poets of his time, *velut inter ignes luna minores*." Smith's reference to his contemporaries as *ignes minores* is hardly gracious, but his comparison of Alsop to Luna was unconsciously appropriate, for a great deal of the light with which Alsop shone was borrowed. Much of his best work was translation. He was an intelligent student of French, Italian, Spanish, Greek, and Latin, and gave some excellent renderings from each. His long poem, "The Charms of Fancy," written in his youth, was not published in full, and his "Conquest of Scandinavia" was never finished. His long poem on the death of Washington has been frequently printed, as well as a number of his contributions to "The Political Greenhouse" and "The Echo." His "Hymn to Peace," written at the close of the last war with England, is not without merit. His most popular verses were political, written in conjunction with the "Hartford Wits."

Dr. Elihu H. Smith enjoys the distinction of having edited the first compilation of American poetry. The volume under the title "American Poems, Selected and Original," was published at Litchfield in 1793, and contained poems by the Connecticut singers, William Livingston, and other writers known and unknown. It is an interesting historical curiosity, showing the development of American poetry in the last decade of

the eighteenth century. As one of our literary landmarks, it has been the means of rescuing from oblivion some things that in an historical sense were worth preserving.

The original works of Dr. Smith are of slight importance, consisting chiefly of "Edwin and Angelina," an opera, and a poetical epistle to Dr. Darwin, author of "The Botanic Garden." The former was acted in 1794, and, as we are informed, was "highly successful" as an opera, if not as a poem. Dr. Smith died in 1798, a martyr to professional generosity, having received into his house a brother physician prostrated with yellow fever, from whom he caught the contagion and died.

The individual efforts of the remainder of the Connecticut group are not worthy of special mention. Lemuel Hopkins and Theodore Dwight, brother of Timothy, wrote a few short poems which found admirers. Dr. M. F. Cogswell wrote no poetry except a few contributions to "The Echo," but each of the three last named wrote sufficient to be entitled to a place among the "Hartford Wits." The last was a name bestowed on members of the Connecticut band who contributed to the three satirical collections known as "The Anarchiad," "The Echo," and "The Political Greenhouse."

"The Anarchiad" was the joint production of Barlow, Humphreys, Trumbull, and Hopkins. The disorganized condition of the country at the close of the Revolution marked one of the "critical periods" in our history. Impoverished by the war, with no firm established government, the people were disheartened and discouraged. The spirit of disunion was rampant and civil war imminent. It was during this time, in 1786

and 1787, that "The Anarchiad" was published. The work, though satirical, was an earnest plea for nationalism as against disunion, and for law and stability as against incipient anarchy.

"The Echo" was a series of satirical effusions published in the newspapers from 1791 to 1796, by Alsop and Theodore Dwight, assisted by Hopkins, Coggsell, and Smith. The work was begun as a travesty on the inflated style of reporting then in vogue among the newspapers. The satirists held up to ridicule the kind of "newspaper English" then prevalent, and if they did not laugh it out of existence, did much in toning down current grandiloquence. Afterwards the authors devoted themselves to partisan politics, bitterly assailing the Jeffersonian faction.

"The Political Greenhouse" was written by Alsop, Hopkins, and Theodore Dwight in 1799, and republished in the same volume with "The Echo" series. There is little of permanent literary interest in either. Both lack the simplicity and historical portraiture that make "McFingal" still readable, and are below the standard of nationalism that marks "The Anarchiad."

"The Echo" and "The Political Greenhouse" have passed utterly out of men's minds. "The Anarchiad" is as little read as its English prototype "The Rolliad." But if contemporary testimony is to be credited, these satirical writings wielded a powerful influence in their day. The shallowest critic can find much to ridicule in the works of the Connecticut singers. Yet these writers rendered a noble service to their country. There was not a great poet among them, but they were all patriots actuated by highest motives. In the formative period of our history they did much to mould

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public opinion in favor of national union and integrity. As among the forces contributing to that end, their influence will continue to be felt, though their names be forgotten. Besides this, they did much to elevate the standard of literary taste then prevalent, and to prepare the way for greater poets. While, therefore, we cannot accept their own literary estimates of each other, we should be unjust to let their amiable failings blind us to the really honorable services they rendered their country.

## CHAPTER VI

### *DELLA CRUSCAN ECHOES*

1785-1815

FOR more than a century after the appearance of Mrs. Bradstreet's forbidding volume of verse, no female poet of any distinction, if we except the youthful Jane Turell, had appeared in America. The awakening of the literary spirit during the transition period is characterized by the sudden appearance and relative importance of female singers, whose voices were not altogether lost amid the clash of arms and discords of politics.

Foremost in time among these was Miss Phillis Wheatley, the precocious negro poetess of revolutionary Boston, whose poems have passed through many editions. A woman of remarkable intellectual force was Mrs. Mercy Warren, also of Boston, whose advice was sought by such men as the Adamses and Thomas Jefferson. She was known even to write speeches for some of the members of the Continental Convention of 1788. One of the speakers, it is said, was detected "in his borrowed plumage by the elegance of the style of his oration, and from his ignorance of some of her classical allusions." Mrs. Warren's long and useful life extended from 1728 to 1814. In 1773 she published "The Adulator," and two years later "The Group," both political satires. Her tragedies, "The Sack of Rome" and "The Ladies of Castile," are now

quite forgotten, though in their day they found admirers. Her tragedies and lighter poems were collected and published as "Poems, Dramatic and Miscellaneous, by Mrs. M. Warren, Boston, 1790." Fifteen years later, in her seventy-eighth year, she published her three-volume history of the Revolution, a work still regarded as an authority.

Mrs. Warren's poems are characterized by good taste and pleasing though by no means faultless diction. Her best known poem is the one written to Hon. John Winthrop in 1774, regarding the necessities of life to be exempted from the threatened suspension of trade with the mother country.

Mrs. Ann Eliza Bleecker, though not conspicuous like Mrs. Warren in public affairs, was put to far severer tests. The sufferings brought upon her while a resident of the New York wilderness during the Revolution resulted in a brooding melancholy from which she never recovered. Mrs. Bleecker's works were published in 1793 in a volume including some poems by her daughter, Mrs. Margaretta V. Faugeres. Neither of these ladies was a great singer, but as the earliest female poets of New York and the Hudson River, they are both entitled to honorable mention. Pennsylvania found a tuneful if not powerful voice in Mrs. Elizabeth Graeme Ferguson, the story of whose social and domestic life possesses greater interest than that of her now forgotten literary career.

The youngest of this interesting sisterhood was Mrs. Susannah Haswell Rowson, daughter of a lieutenant in the British navy. She became an American by reason of her father settling in Massachusetts when she was but five years old. Owing to reversals after marriage, Mrs. Rowson was obliged to go upon the stage, some-

times acting in plays which she herself had written. Her first appearance upon the American stage was in 1793, at Annapolis. She became famous as the author of "Charlotte Temple," a tearful romance, which still finds readers. She was a versatile writer, producing a number of sentimental novels, short tales, dramas, and school text-books. Her reputation as a writer of verse rests upon her "Miscellaneous Poems," published in Boston in 1804. Her lyric "America, Commerce and Freedom" attained a considerable degree of popularity as one of the patriotic songs of the period, though hardly exhibiting a spirit of feminine refinement.

Taking them all in all, these songstresses constituted a singular group. An ungallant cynic might well ask what degree of literary excellence would be expected of a band made up chiefly of a negro slave, a female revolutionist, a hypochondriac, a society belle, and a gushing sentimentalist. Yet it was from such a heterogeneous source that our infant literature was receiving its nourishment. It was a sentimental era in poetry, and this fact may account for the sudden preponderance of the gentler sex.

About the year 1785 some English ladies and gentlemen resident in Florence, and devoted to nothing more serious than æsthetic dilettanteism, contributed their amateur literary effusions to a periodical which they called "The Florence Miscellany." Reviving a sixteenth-century designation, they called themselves "Della Cruskans." Not content with their narrow Italian environments, they transported their methods to England, and the columns of "The World" and "The Oracle" teemed with their eccentricities and affectations. Prominent among the swarm of these

sentimental verse-writers was Robert Merry, who, on his return from Florence, "immediately announced himself by a sonnet to Love." This was responded to by a congenial spirit signing herself "Anna Matilda." "The fever," says William Gifford, "now turned to a frenzy; Laura, Maria, Carlos, Orlando, Adelaide, and a thousand other nameless names, caught the infection, and from one end of the kingdom to the other, all was nonsense and Della Crusca." "There was a specious brilliancy in these exotics," the same critic adds, "which dazzled the native grubs, who had scarce ever ventured beyond a sheep and a crook, and a rose-tree grove; with an ostentatious display of blue hills and crashing torrents and petrifying suns."

The life of this school in England was short. In 1794 Gifford published his "Mæviad," and in 1796 his "Baviad," excoriating the whole clan, subjecting its adherents to such scorn that the very name of "Della Crusca" became a by-word. The germs of this noxious growth, however, were wafted across the ocean, taking root in our own poetic soil only to bear the most pernicious crop. Many of our verse writers were infected by its exhalations, and even long after it had been exterminated in England it still continued to flourish in America. As late as 1797 Robert Treat Paine, Jr., could thus attenuate a familiar sentiment of Gray:—

"Heroes and bards, who nobler flights have won,  
Than Cæsar's eagles, or the Mantuan swan,  
From eldest era share the common doom;  
The sun of glory shines but on the tomb,  
Firm as the Mede the stern decree subdues,  
The brightest pageant of the proudest Muse.  
Man's noblest powers could ne'er the law revoke,  
Though Handel harmonized what Chatham spoke;  
Though tuneful Morton's magic genius graced  
The Hyblean melody of Merry's taste."



The poet furnishes this explanatory note to the last couplet:—

“Robert Merry, esquire, the only pupil in the school of Collins, who possesses the genius of his master, is the author of those elegant poems in the British Album signed Della Crusca of Paulina. . . . Mrs. Morton, of Dorchester, the reputed authoress of an heroic poem of much merit, entitled ‘Beacon Hill,’ may, without hesitation, be announced the American Sappho.”

Mrs. Sarah Wentworth Morton (1759–1846), here referred to, properly belongs to this period, though one of her volumes was published several years later. She frequently contributed to the “Massachusetts Magazine” while the Della Cruscan epidemic was at its height. Among other things she wrote lines addressed to “the inimitable author of the poems under the signature of Della Crusca.” Mrs. Morton owes most of whatever fame can be claimed for her to the frequent association of her name with that of Robert Treat Paine, Jr., though she is the only American female poet deemed worthy of mention by Dr. Samuel Miller, one of our earliest literary historians. She appears to have carried on, with Mr. Paine, in the magazine referred to, a poetical correspondence, which is republished in the volume of Mr. Paine’s works. Many of Mr. Paine’s poems are addressed to her as “Philenia,” “The Laurellled Nymph,” etc.

Addressing Paine as “Menander,” Mrs. Morton goes still farther. If she was to be known as the “American Sappho,” Paine is evidently the greatest literary phenomenon that the world has ever produced, combining within himself the strength of Homer, the polish of Ovid, and the swiftness of Pindar. Stanza after

stanza of honeyed insipidity is inflicted on the reader, regardless of the depressing effect. In a paroxysm of hysterical metaphor, Philenia refers to the solace his verse confers upon her bankrupt bosom. As in duty bound, Menander replies:—

“Thy ‘bosom bankrupt!’—Ah, those sorrows cease  
Which taught us how to weep, and how admire;  
The tear that falls to soothe thy wounded peace  
With rapture glistens o’er thy matchless lyre,  
Ind and Golconda, in one firm combined,  
Shall sooner bankrupt than Philenia’s mind.”

But in spite of these confident assurances, the fame of the “American Sappho” has long since followed that of contemporary American Homers and Virgils to the limbo of hopeless oblivion.

Robert Treat Paine, Jr. (1773–1811), born at Taunton, is the only poet of note produced by Harvard during this period. In spite of “Homeric Dwight” and “Virgilian Barlow,” he narrowly missed placing himself at the head of the American poets of his day. His admirers claimed for him a place “on the same shelf with the Prince of English rhyme.” Meeting with phenomenal success as a college poet, gifted with an extraordinary facility for writing rhymes, and with a vivid but utterly untrained fancy, Paine mistook the applause of admiring friends for the verdict of the literary world. Disowned by his father on account of a supposed *mésalliance*, and forced to depend upon his own efforts for support, he proved himself incapable of battling with the world, plunged into a career of dissipation, and died in his thirty-eighth year.

Paine is supposed to have adopted Dryden as his model, but he did not hesitate to appropriate from

Pope, Denham, and other popular writers. He was a reader, though hardly an appreciative student, of the best English poets, and was sadly tainted with the imbecilities of the Della Cruscans. His works abound in false syntax, bad prosody, and errors of taste.

The "College Exercises," which occupy so large a portion of his published volume, betray the unwholesome flavor which usually distinguishes such unripe products. Even in his maturer efforts he lets his fervid fancy run loose, wrests words from their legitimate meanings, and seeks to gain piquancy by confounding oddness with originality.

On the other hand, that Paine could write reasonably well is evidenced by some passages in his "Prize Prologue," spoken at the opening of the first theatre in Boston in 1794. The drama had received a chilly welcome in New England. In 1749 a play had been acted at Boston, but popular sentiment was so scandalized at the appearance of the drama at all, that the next General Court passed a law imposing upon the owner of any building used for dramatic purposes a fine of twenty pounds for each performance, and a fine of five pounds each on every actor and spectator. In spite of this, while the British were in possession of Boston, in 1775, the first play both written and acted in America, Burgoyne's "Blockade of Boston," was produced in that city. After the close of the Revolution, the growing liberal sentiment demanded a relaxation of these severe restrictions, but it was not until 1793 that the law in suppression of dramatic performances was repealed. It is a pleasing coincidence that the unshackling of the drama was heralded by an effort of poetic genius which was a credit to our literature.

The most popular of Paine's longer poems are "The

Invention of Letters" (1795) and "The Ruling Passion" (1797). There is little in either of these to justify the laudatory notices of the editors. His ode "Adams and Liberty" had an enormous circulation in this country and in England, and is still frequently published. It is suggestive of both Campbell and Thomson, but has a vigor and rhythm of its own. Its merits were no doubt greatly overestimated, but the American public of that time was not severely critical of its patriotic literature.

Paine, in spite of his sensitiveness, had no occasion to complain of lack of appreciation. No previous writer had received such substantial recognition. Probably for the first time in our history, literature met with extraordinary financial returns. "Adams and Liberty" yielded the author seven hundred and fifty dollars profit; "The Ruling Passion," twelve hundred dollars profit; and "The Invention of Letters," fifteen hundred dollars, "exclusive of expense," — prices, considering the quality of the works, that must strike later verse-writers as something bewildering. He had no difficulty in obtaining a ready market for his wares, and if, to use his own words, he was

"Doom'd, horrid fate, the living Muse to see  
Bound to the mouldering corpse of penury,"

it was his own dilettanteism, and not public indifference that was the responsible cause. The vices of Paine's style are so much more conspicuous than its virtues, that his influence, so far as it went, was anything but wholesome. The Anna Matilda spirit continued to infect our minor singers. Sickishness was mistaken for tenderness. Silly and worn-out conceits still gushed from our literary fonts, American Phile-

nias and Orlandos echoed the sweetened platitudes of the Lauras and Edwins across the water.

Dr. Joseph B. Ladd was as sentimental as Mrs. Morton in her most tearful moods. This unfortunate gentleman was born at Newport, Rhode Island, in 1764. With a decided taste for literature, young Ladd fought bravely against heavy odds, and was on the point of being crowned with success when his career was cut short by early death.

In his twentieth year, Ladd, upon the advice of General Nathaniel Greene, removed to South Carolina, where he rapidly gained distinction as a successful physician and writer. Before leaving the North he had become enamored of a young lady, the subject, under the name of "Amanda," of so many of his woe-begone effusions. He wrote under the name of "Arouet," and that he aroused admiration is shown by the poetic tributes uttered in his praise. Thus "Philomela" writes to "Arouet:"—

"Oh! when the angelic choir all gather'd round  
The eternal throne, their silver harps shall sound,  
Shall not thy numbers wake the warbling wire?  
And when at last this world dissolves in fire,  
Shall not some cherub snatch the favor'd lays  
And save thy sacred relics from the blaze?  
Yes,  
Eternity shall bear the strains along,  
While listening saints admire, and seraphs learn the song."

As if that were not enough, another verse-writer, after referring to Homer and his successors, declares:—

"Again he lives, and what was Homer's now  
With common voice on Arouet we bestow;  
The high sublime of the divine old bard  
Breathes in thy numbers, in thy song is heard;  
No more we Homer's imitator see,  
For thou, sweet poet, thou thyself art he."

If Dr. Ladd was indeed what was so confidently claimed for him, it is interesting to note the metamorphosis undergone by the Homeric spirit in the course of ages. This modern Homer's favorite themes are swelling sighs and falling tears and mournful melancholy. He complains of the tortures of his faithful heart caused by the absence of his Amanda, and again and again calls upon her to join sighs with his sighs, tears with his tears.

Such was the weak and puling condition of the greater part of American verse when from Philadelphia came the first manly voice in denunciation of its shallowness. William Clifton (1772-1799) of that city was one of the few poets whose youthful productions betoken a sound, clear sense, and a thorough contempt for fashionable shams and nonsense. Clifton, like so many early Pennsylvania singers, notably Godfrey, Evans, and Linn, died young. His writings gave promise of unusual powers. He was thoroughly in earnest, and assailed current demagogism and pretentious mediocrity with all the bitterness of an accomplished satirist. His political strictures are no doubt overdrawn, but they furnish a refreshing relief to so much of the bombastic fustian that passed for patriotic poetry. Clifton, though of Quaker descent, was thoroughly infused with the anti-Jacobin spirit, and wrote some stirring war lyrics. When Gifford's "Baviad and Mæviad" was published in Philadelphia in 1799, Clifton wrote for the book a poetic epistle to the author, in which he vigorously denounced the degeneracy of current literature.

In the meantime Clifton's efforts were being ably seconded by another writer, Judge Royall Tyler (1756-1825), of Vermont, who is remembered as the author of

the first American comedy put upon the stage. His "Contrast" was acted at the old John Street Theatre in New York, in 1786. In it appears for the first time a character long since grown painfully familiar, the stage Yankee. Tyler was humorist enough to detect and detest the fashionable literary follies. Under the signature of "Della Yankee" he published what he called "An Address to Della Crusca, Humbly Attempted in the Sublime Style of that Fashionable Author." After holding up to ridicule the whole "school," especially in its American environment, the "Address" concludes:—

"Rise, Della Crusca, prince of bards sublime,  
And pour on us whole cataracts of rhyme.  
Son of the sun, arise, whose lightest rays  
All merge to tapers in thy ignite blaze,  
Like some colossus, stride the Atlantic o'er,  
A leg of genius place on either shore.  
Extend thy red, right arm to either world,  
Be the proud standard of thy style unfurl'd;  
Proclaim thy sounding page from shore to shore,  
And swear that sense in verse shall be no more."

Error dies hard. In spite of the denunciations of English and American satirists, Della Cruscanism lingered in this country for years. Otherwise intelligent, sensible men of the world seemed to be smitten with temporary imbecility the moment they seized a pen to indite lines to their Celias and Cynthias and Clarissas. As late as 1814 Edwin C. Holland, a young attorney of Charleston, published his little volume of "Odes, Naval Songs, and other Occasional Poems." His writings for the press were under the signature of "Orlando," and were among the last of the Della Cruscan echoes. His ode, "The Pillar of Glory," obtained a national popularity.

The perplexing imagery of this poem would seem to justify Judge Tyler's suggestion in the last line of the Della Cruscan "Address," above quoted. Holland's ode, "Rise, Columbia," is suggestive of Paine, who seems to have inspired several of his productions.

Mr. Holland received some kindly advice as well as criticism from Washington Irving, who thought he discerned signs of genius in the poems, in spite of the occurrence of "lucid vests veiling snowy breasts," and "satin sashes" and "sighs of rosy perfume," and

"The sweetest of perfumes that, languishing, flies  
Like a kiss on the nectarous morning-tide air."

Mr. Holland's early death at the age of thirty prevented his profiting by Irving's sensible suggestions.

A twin evil of Della Cruscanism presented itself in the Ossianic spirit of the time. Ladd wrote adulatory lines to the "bard of the mournful brow," as well as paraphrases of portions of McPherson's epics, one of which is made to appear as "translated from Fingal" by Ladd. Jonathan Mitchell Sewall (1746-1808), whose poetic fame rests on a single couplet, likewise wrote paraphrases of Ossian. Another Ossianic bard of this period was John Blair Linn (1777-1804), a native of Pennsylvania, but afterward a resident of New York. While under his Ossianic spell he wrote a poem on the death of Washington, and later, the work by which he may be still remembered, "The Powers of Genius." This is an exceedingly dull poem in three parts. It passed through several editions in this country and England.

While on the subject of echoes and imitations, a word may be added concerning translations. A con-



spicuous writer of this class during the period under examination was John Parke, born in Delaware about the middle of the eighteenth century. In 1786, at Philadelphia, appeared as the work of his hands a volume called "The Lyric Works of Horace, translated into English verse." These efforts are paraphrases rather than translations, adapted to current events and addressed to distinguished Americans of the time, the translator going so far as to substitute Martha Washington for the wife of Augustus. The opening lines of "Exegimonumentum," etc., are thus rendered:—

"A monument I've rais'd that shall surpass  
In firm duration one of solid brass;  
Higher than Egypt's pyramid that stands  
With towering pride the work of kingly hands,  
Unmov'd it shall outstand the wasting rain,  
While feeble north winds threaten it in vain."

But even this is not quite so shocking as Josias Lyndon Arnold's attempt (1797) in the manner of Sternhold and Hopkins, —

"Of fame a mighty monument  
In time erect will I,  
Than brass more hard and durable,  
Or eke eternity.

"Sublimer, — O far more sublime,  
Than pyramids full high,  
That stretch their tops, and all upon  
Fair Egypt's plain do lie.

"Not Boreas from out the north  
Rude rushing all so bold,  
Nor rain nor wind that round doth roar,  
Nor age that's yet untold," etc.

The actual amount of verse inspired by contemporary events during and subsequent to the Revolution was

something appalling. No attempt is made to give an exhaustive statement. However much these works may have been admired in their day, they are now virtually as obsolete as the lost writings of the ancients. It is sufficient to refer to James Allen's "Lines on the Massacre" (Boston, 1772), "The Retrospect," and "Bunker Hill," an epic happily never published; Hugh Henry Brackenridge's "The Battle of Bunker's Hill, a dramatic piece in five acts by a gentleman of Maryland" (Philadelphia, 1776); St. John Honeywood's posthumous poems (New York, 1801) relative to Washington's declination of a third term, Shays' rebellion, and the French Revolution; and a little later, Thomas Green Fessenden's alleged humorous and satirical poems of considerable popularity in their day, but totally unreadable now. To these might be added the names of "single poem poets," like Francis Hopkinson, author of "The Battle of the Kegs" (1777); his son, Joseph Hopkinson, author of "Hail Columbia" (1798); and Francis Scott Key, author of "The Star Spangled Banner" (1814), the last-named lyric being the only one inspired by the war of 1812 that has survived. This list might be easily swelled, but it would be neither edifying nor entertaining.

As may be inferred, the condition of American poetry during the formative period of our history was anything but brilliant. For the most part it was dull, feeble, and imitative. Even among those who, by comparison, are known as our greater poets there was a straining for effect, a preponderance of the intellectual over the imaginative, a profusion of epithets, of old and worn-out themes, of stale and trite conceits. With but few honorable exceptions, our singers seemed deter-

mined to ignore the simplicities of nature and to strive after the wordy, the grandiose, and the bathetic. Cold, unimaginative, and uncreative, their effusions, save as chronicles of current events, made no appeals to the hearts and sympathies of the people. These writers could compose turgid epics; high-stepping tragedies; moral, didactic, and perfunctory odes; clumsy idyls and unnatural pastorals; lyrics to which no lyre could be attuned; songs that could not be sung; and dramas devoid of dramatic action. So dominating was the artificial, the verbose, the declamatory method on the one hand, and the soft, sickly, sentimental style on the other, that reform seemed almost hopeless. Philip Freneau's vigorous verse was the "one ruddy drop of manly blood" that outweighed the surging sea of epics, dramas, monodies, rhyming pæans, Ossianic parodies, and Della Cruscan inanities that broke upon our shores and threatened to engulf everything that was true, simple, and genuine.

American verse, impressive though it was in quantity, was in a condition of chaos when the successful issue of the second war with England established us among the great nations of the earth. Not until then was it possible for a literary class to rise and make its influence felt. With peace firmly secured as never before, our national dignity sustained, and our provincialism in great measure outgrown, we were in a position to devote attention to the higher walks of art and literature. The storms of the Revolution had hardly passed before we were threatened with gravest internal dissensions. Domestic and foreign policies, European complications, and at last the second war, were the all-engrossing topics. Under such conditions, higher literature naturally could not flourish much more success-

fully than during our colonial period. But amid so much that was worthless may still be discerned a few germs of that poetic spirit that was to bear fruit in the efforts of those who have made memorable the golden era of American song.

## CHAPTER VII

### *BIRTH OF THE ARTISTIC SPIRIT*

1813-1839

THE aphorism that poetry is the first and art the last born of the Muses is not altogether applicable to America. It is true, we wrote verses a hundred years before we painted pictures. But the works of our native-born artists were recognized and appreciated abroad, while our singers had to remain content with a home audience. The masterpieces of our Wests, Copleys, Stuarts, and Trumbulls still find admirers, though the achievements of their literary compatriots have been allowed to slumber. In what, for the sake of convenience, we have termed our second literary period the artistic found a higher development than did the poetic spirit. As our highest mental activities were devoted to questions of war and statecraft, so our greatest æsthetic achievements were in the works of our artists. The truly creative painter is necessarily a poet, though he adopts a different medium from that of the verse writer. The higher creations of West and Copley certainly appeal to the imagination far more strongly than do mechanical epics like "The Columbiad" and "The Conquest of Canaan." Though our early artists naturally sought a more congenial atmosphere than the perturbed condition of their native land could offer, America is justly entitled to claim their fame. The Puritan spirit of colonial Boston was well nigh as fatal

to Copley's aspirations as the Quaker prejudices of Philadelphia had threatened to be to those of West. But both artists had been imbued with a true American spirit. When West broke away from conventional canons, and, to the admiration of Sir Joshua Reynolds, proved that classicism was not indispensable to true art, he wrought an artistic revolution which, like the subject of his painting, was thoroughly American.

The effect of the works of these native artists in stimulating among us the love of the beautiful should not be ignored in a history of our literary development. Gradually the public mind was breaking away from its provincial environments and beginning to appreciate beauty for its own sake.

At the threshold of our productive period appears a figure unique among his American contemporaries, the representative of the highest form of poetry and art that our country up to that time had produced. Washington Allston (1779-1843) was a native of South Carolina, sprung from one of its oldest and most distinguished families, but his training and education were at the North. He attended school at Newport and graduated at Harvard in the class of 1800, delivering a poem at the Commencement.

Allston's first publication was a little volume called "The Sylphs of the Seasons and Other Poems," published in London in 1813, and later in the same year in Boston. His literary and artistic career extended for a period of thirty years from that date.

During Allston's sojourns in Europe he enjoyed the friendship of some of the most eminent poets and artists of the day.

Coleridge in his "Sibylline Leaves," published in 1817, complimented the American poet-artist by insert-

ing the latter's poem "America and Great Britain," with the note: "This poem written by an American gentleman, a valued and dear friend, I communicate to the reader for its moral no less than its patriotic spirit." The author's copy of this book passed into the possession of Longfellow. In the handwriting of Mr. Coleridge is a marginal note to the poem, "by Washington Allston, a painter born to renew the fifteenth century." The author of "The Ancient Mariner" declared to Thomas Campbell that Allston had "poetic and artistic genius unsurpassed by any man of his age." He was "the first genius produced by the western world." Southey pronounced some of Allston's poems "among the first productions of modern times," and declared to William Collins, the artist, that whatever defects some of them might have, he had no hesitation in saying that they could not have proceeded from any but a poetic mind, "in which sentiment he was most cordially supported by Wordsworth, who was present at the time." Mr. Wilkie Collins, in his life of his father, says of Allston: "To a profound and reflective intellect he united an almost feminine delicacy of taste and tenderness of heart, which gave a peculiar charm to his conversation, and an unusual eloquence to his opinions." Wordsworth, who regarded Allston as the first artist of the age, was attached to him "first as his own friend, and then as the affectionate friend of Coleridge."

An American who at that time could so favorably impress himself upon some of the greatest minds of England must certainly have been gifted with more than usual powers. No American poet up to that time had evoked such encomiums from the mother country.

Allston's rank among our earlier artists is sufficiently

established. His position among our poets is by no means so assured. His writings do not seem to have met with any degree of popularity in their time, and his poetical reputation is now chiefly a reminiscence. Yet few of his American contemporaries who enjoyed far greater reputation as poets were so well deserving of the name. His poetical writings were not numerous, but our literature could ill afford to lose them. His vivid fancy, trained imagination, and lofty conceptions, clothed in simple, elegant diction, are among the features that marked the new era of American song. His few sonnets and ballads are models of simplicity. But in none of his works has he excelled the brilliant poetic imagery displayed in his poem "The Angel and the Nightingale." The elevated purpose that inspires this poem is well preserved throughout by appropriate and picturesque language. It is one of the earliest efforts in American verse to celebrate the power of abstract beauty, as well as the magical influence of song. Utterly unlike that of the representative "American bards" who preceded him was the genius of Washington Allston. His sensitive nature shrank with disgust from the inflated bragging style that disfigured so much of what up to his time had been called American poetry. The gentle artist who would refuse for gold to prostitute his talents to even a suspicion of impurity, and who shrank with horror from depicting battle scenes, could not descend to anything low or sensational in his verse.

Allston was great among his contemporaries by the strength of his individuality. This seems to have made itself felt wherever it penetrated, whether in the art galleries of Italy or amid the prosaic surroundings of Cambridgeport. The glimpses of the painter-poet



in his youth and old age, as preserved in the sketches of Irving and Lowell respectively, confirm the remarkable impressions made upon the great English poets. American literature, even more than American art, is indebted to Washington Allston for being among the first to raise it from the level of a dull mediocrity.

Richard Henry Dana (1787-1879) was Allston's junior by eight years, but his literary career was almost strictly contemporaneous, though he survived his brother-in-law thirty-six years. Dana was a native of Cambridge, Mass., and spent most of the ninety-two years of his life in the neighborhood of Boston. On his mother's side he was a lineal descendant of Mrs. Bradstreet, our first female poet. While attending school at Newport he first met Allston, when was begun the remarkable friendship broken only by the latter's death. It was Dana who gave a cordial welcome to Allston's first volume, cheered, encouraged, and applauded his later efforts, and wrote a feeling tribute to the memory of the artist-poet, to whom he was endeared by so many ties.

Dana as a poet was more meditative but less creative, more critical but less imaginative, than his kinsman; yet his poetical reputation was the greater of the two. Allston was great as an artist, Dana as a critic. Neither of them was absolutely great as a poet, though relatively, as compared with their predecessors, both wrote poetry of a high order. Dana was pre-eminently a man of letters, and though he wrote but little, his career is inseparably connected with the development of our national literature. He was educated for the law, but in 1815 abandoned it for the more precarious profession of authorship. He was one of the earliest editors of the "North American Review," and by his

admirably written essays did much to establish the high standard ever maintained by that periodical. In 1821 he attempted what at the time, from a financial point of view, was a most rash experiment, the publication of the literary periodical called "The Idle Man." Bryant and Allston aided by their contributions, and the work was issued by the New York publishing house of Charles Wiley. It was not appreciated by the literary taste of the day, and was abandoned at the close of the first volume.

Dana's first poem, "The Dying Raven," was published in 1825, and he wrote but little after 1833. His own critical taste was evidently so highly refined that he despaired of satisfying it. Because he could not realize his lofty ideal, he preferred to remain silent. He was one of the earliest Americans to lead in the revolt against the artificial style that had been worn so threadbare. Following the standard of Wordsworth as devoutly as his predecessors had that of Pope, he contributed his influence in the direction of truth and simplicity. Though he never descended to the prosaical dulness of his model's worst work, yet in the severity of his style he is sometimes crude and even harsh. His long poem "The Buccaneer" is a weird romance of crime and remorse, and probably the best of the many narrative poems inspired by the theme of the "Ancient Mariner." It is in this poem that the author's descriptive powers appear at their best.

In depicting the strongest human feelings and emotions, such as avarice and cruelty, bravado and cowardice, defiance and remorse, the poem possesses a certain power that both fascinates and repels the reader. There are passages of remarkable beauty that are almost sublime, yet one finishes its perusal with the

feeling that the poet's execution falls short of the high design. There is a lack of melody in spite of its elaborate finish, as well as a lack of those essentials that appeal to the sympathies of the reader, and leave indelible impressions upon his memory. It is neither a great nor a beautiful poem. At the time of its appearance, however, the great Scotch critic was perhaps correct in declaring, "We pronounce it by far the most powerful and original of American poetic compositions."

Few writers have excelled Dana in his poetic interpretation of nature, yet through all his poems there is a spirit of subdued melancholy that becomes almost tedious, — the same quality that long since drove his powerful prose tales to oblivion. His little poem on the "Beach Bird" is pretty enough, but one has only to contrast its sorrowful and gloomy spirit with the gentle optimism of a companion poet's lines "To a Water Fowl," to understand why Dana's poem is almost forgotten, while that of Bryant has become a household classic. Dana was never a popular poet. The changes of time were distressing to him. From his retirement he could see the world sweeping past him, paying little heed to his utterances, while he lacked the mental force to put himself in accord with his age. His later life, perhaps embittered by disappointment, seems to have been tainted with the common complaint of "neglected genius." In 1853 he wrote to a friend: "I cannot feel in sympathy with what is distinctively American in us. All I can say is, I wish my country were better than it is — less blustering, boastful, grasping, sharp, vulgarly ostentatious, less absorbed in things physical, less dead of sense to our finer natures. I'm patriot enough for that, thank God! but there my patriotism ends." And in 1854 he wrote: "My heart

has always yearned for old England — less, to be sure, after the reform bill and the death of Coleridge; but still the feeling is strong. I do wish well to my country, and trust that the Lord will lift it up at last. But as it is now, I cannot find in it that which I most long for.”<sup>1</sup> Yet at the time that Mr. Dana was uttering his complaint, Irving and Hawthorne, Emerson and Longfellow, whose dispositions were fully as sensitive and refined as his own, had succeeded in creating an appreciative audience for themselves, even under the deplorable conditions that confronted the author of “The Buccaneer.”

While the artistic Allston and the meditative Dana were writing their graceful pieces for a limited audience, Charles Sprague (1791–1875), of Boston, though not gifted with the poetic imagination of either, was far more successful in reaching the popular heart. Many of his pieces were occasional odes, songs, and even prize prologues. His ode written for a triennial celebration of the Massachusetts Charitable Mechanics Association in 1818 was one of the earliest of a series of successful poems, which he continued to manufacture for special occasions for the next dozen years. It was before the same association, six years later, that he delivered his poem on “Art,” which was greatly admired in its day. His “Shakespeare Ode,” delivered at the Boston Theatre in 1823, at the exhibition of a pageant in honor of Shakespeare, betokens a wondrous development of taste in a generation succeeding the one that was horrified at anything of a dramatic nature. At the time of its delivery only a score of years had elapsed since the first New England reprint of Shakespeare had been published.

<sup>1</sup> Wilson's “Bryant and his Friends,” p. 214.

Sprague's longest poem, "Curiosity," was delivered before the Phi Beta Kappa Society of Harvard in 1823. It is difficult to understand how such a production could obtain such popularity. It is of exemplary form, finished versification, and approved rhetoric, but mechanical in design and treatment, and, on the whole, rather tedious. It was one of the successful poems of the day, was largely read and quoted in this country, and grossly plagiarized in England.

One of the most conspicuous figures in our literary history was John Pierpont, who was born at Litchfield, Connecticut, in 1785, and died in Medford, Massachusetts, in 1866. As early as 1812 he delivered a pessimistic poem, "The Portrait," before the Washington Benevolent Society of Newburyport. In 1816 he published at Baltimore his long poem "The Airs of Palestine," which at once placed him among the foremost of American poets. It was intended, as the author explains, that its recitation "should form a part of the performance of an evening concert of sacred music for the benefit of the poor. It was indeed a volunteer in the cause, but its aid was coldly received, or rather coldly declined wherever it made its trembling advances; and it was thus stung into the resolution of appearing before the public; not indeed to solicit the succor of charity for others but the rites of hospitality for itself." The author's persistency was rewarded in the popular favor extended to the little volume, which passed through several editions in this country and England. The poem itself is simply a meditation upon the influence of music as applied to Jewish history and, to a limited extent, to noted occurrences of all times. Our literature in 1816 had not become emancipated from its thralldom to Pope, whose influence is manifest through-

out the finished versification of the whole poem. The growing spirit of Americanism is visible in several of the melodious passages, especially in the tribute to Chateaubriand, the "poetic pilgrim of the West."

Pierpont was the most thoroughly national of all the poets of this period thus far considered. His patriotic lyrics are among the best and most spirited in our literature. His hymns and odes for anniversary and other celebrations are all in clear, vigorous, Saxon English. "The Fugitive Slave's Apostrophe to the North Star," "The Gag," and "The Tocsin" are among the best of our anti-slavery lyrics. "A Word from a Petitioner" is memorable as containing one of our "familiar quotations." He has given at least one beautiful lyric, which, as a creation of pure fancy as distinguished from imagination, is unsurpassed in American poetry. His "Passing Away," in its fanciful conception and melodious diction, suggests what its author was capable of doing in the direction of pure literature.

All four of the poets to whom this chapter has been devoted properly belonged to Massachusetts. One of them, it is true, was a native of South Carolina and another of Connecticut, but the life-work of each was performed while residing in the first-named State. Their writings have been selected as among the best representatives of the highest forms of literature produced in New England during the thirty years preceding 1840. Among our writers of that epoch who had established reputations as poets, but one has stood the crucial test of time, and is still read and admired. As that poet's literary career, however, extended through a succeeding generation, a consideration of his writings is deferred to a later period.

We have happily reached that stage in our literary development when it is no longer necessary to chronicle the name of every versifier. American verse has gradually assumed a life and spirit of its own. The era is one of transition. The influence of Pope has yielded to that of Wordsworth and Coleridge, and this transformation may be witnessed by a comparison of the earlier and later effusions of the writers that have just passed under review. But at best these writers were mostly imitative. They reflected honor and credit, indeed, upon their nation's literature, while failing in those higher flights of song attainable only by the great. It is natural, therefore, that their works should perish with them. But each has left at least one poem worthy of place among our best. Allston's "Angel and the Nightingale," Dana's "Buccaneer," Sprague's "Shakespeare Ode," and Pierpont's "Passing Away" are notable, each betokening an artistic, creative spirit strangely unfamiliar to readers of earlier American verse.

## CHAPTER VIII

### *THE "KNICKERBOCKER SCHOOL"*

1807-1840

THE gloomy spirit of early Puritanism survived in the tender melancholy of Dana, Pierpont, and other New England singers. Very different in tone and temper was that group of verse writers who appeared on Manhattan Island, and by pointed satire, if not poetic merit, soon forced an audience for themselves, had New York society by the ears, and in a number of ways made themselves conspicuous and notorious, if not famous and respected. There was nothing suggestive of neglected genius in their careers. They had no reason to complain of public indifference, for every one was talking about them, and when they tired of satirizing the public they satirized each other. People might ignore "The Sylphs of the Seasons," show a cold indifference to "The Buccaneer" and "The Airs of Palestine," and even yawn over the polished mediocrity of "Curiosity," but the "Salmagundi" and the "Croaker" Papers were certain to find readers and provoke comment.

The "Salmagundi Papers" appeared in 1807 and were abandoned at the end of a year, though an effort was made to revive them in 1819. The new series lacked the freshness and vivacity of the original and proved a failure. The first series was written chiefly by Washington Irving and James Kirke Paulding, though the



poetical contributions are said to have been the exclusive work of William Irving (1766-1821), elder brother of Washington Irving, and brother-in-law of Paulding. There is nothing whatever of lasting value in these metrical attempts at mingled mirth and sentiment, though they enjoyed a sort of prestige by association with successful prose writings. Nothing like "Salmagundi" had appeared in American literature. Dr. Francis, one of the "Old Guard" of the New York literature, writes of it:—

"Ere a dozen numbers of 'Salmagundi' were issued, quite a commotion arose among the literati and the public concerning the work and its authors. The humble drudges about town, who had lived obscurely, yet fancied themselves members of the literary world by their revision of Dilworth and the editors of catechisms with explanatory notes, were astounded at the great eclat which elegant letters secured, and which was denied to their uninventive products; while fashionable co-teries everywhere were prodigal of conjectures from what mine the gold dust was brought to light for the commonwealth of letters. 'Salmagundi' was found at almost every tea table. The sale announced the fact that literary property was both vendible and profitable." <sup>1</sup>

The success of these papers stimulated more serious work. James Kirke Paulding (1778-1860), not satisfied with his mastery of light satire, determined to transmit his name to future ages as the author of a great American epic. In 1818 appeared his heroic poem "The Backwoodsman," an attempt to portray American incidents in a thoroughly American setting. As was to be expected, the set purpose of the author to be really and truly national is so obvious that it destroys

<sup>1</sup> Quoted in introduction to Duyckinck's edition of "Salmagundi," 1860.

the spontaneity essential to poetry. He ignored the simple truth that originality of subject by no means implied originality of thought or treatment. By the singular irony of fate his labored poetical effort has passed entirely from men's minds, while the only specimen of his verse that has survived in popular favor is the alliterative nonsense concerning Peter Piper and his peck of pickled peppers, the lines being from Paulding's first novel, "Köningsmarke," published in 1823.

The year 1819, in which Paulding made his unsuccessful effort to revive the "Salmagundi Papers," witnessed the appearance of a remarkable series of satirical writings published as the work of "The Croakers." Though of transient and local interest, they displayed a poetic and critical genius lacking in the "Salmagundi Papers." For months the columns of the New York "Evening Post" were graced by these sprightly papers, which still possess a certain historic interest as reflecting phases of metropolitan society and politics of the day. The authors were true poets, though at the time they were hardly known to the public. It was early in 1819, when Joseph Rodman Drake and Fitz Greene Halleck were in the office of Dr. Langstaff in New York, that Drake, on the spur of the moment, jotted down his burlesque poem "To Ennui," upon which Halleck at once placed the seal of his approval. The effort so commended itself to the young poets that, though with some trepidation, they sent it to the "Evening Post" for publication. The series proved a success from the start, and were the literary hit of the day in America, inspiring countless imitations, and setting the reading world of New York ablaze. The writers were extolled, abused, and threatened "as much,

I believe I can say with truth," says Halleck, "as any writers since the days of Junius." Refined satire had at that time all the attractions of novelty for American readers. One of these little poems whose pleasantry may be appreciated to-day is the "Ode to Simeon DeWitt, Esq." Mr. DeWitt was the surveyor-general of the State, to whose execrable taste is attributed the system of classic nomenclature that disfigures so much of western New York. Pedantry never offered a more shining mark for the shafts of ridicule.

But the "Croaker Papers" were not all satirical. Drake's "American Flag," with its concluding quatrain by Halleck, was written in May, 1819, and published as other "Croaker Papers" in the "Post." This was the noblest patriotic American poem that had yet appeared. It was so far superior to the previous stilted efforts of our patriotic "bards" as in itself to mark an epoch in one branch of our national verse.

Joseph Rodman Drake (1795-1820) was the first native poet of New York City to achieve permanent fame. He began his rhymes when but five years old, and even his boyish sports were inspired by Don Quixote and Ossian. At fourteen he wrote "The Mocking Bird," showing in its musical lines a rare degree of precocity.

Drake was a thorough believer in his native land. He desired to see her streams and hills as celebrated in song and story as the classic regions of Europe. It was in this spirit that "The Culprit Fay" was written. This, the longest of Drake's poems, was written in 1816, though not published until several years later. It was as great an advance upon American narrative poetry as his "American Flag" was upon our patriotic verse. It showed both originality and spontaneity.

Composed in three days, and written to sustain the theory that American streams are as well adapted to the uses of poetry as those of the old world, the work shows unmistakable signs of hasty composition. Whatever defects hypercriticism may discern, this poem still retains its place in the hearts of the people, and is irrevocably associated with the romance of the Hudson River. As a work of true poetic fancy rather than of profound imagination, "The Culprit Fay" continues to be the most widely read of any long American poem produced up to that time. The same strength of fancy that idealizes the Hudson appears in many of Drake's shorter poems, notably in his four-line description of Niagara Falls, one of the few attempts in literature worthy of the subject.

The poet died in 1820, at the age of twenty-five, having given but an earnest of his extraordinary powers.

Fitz Greene Halleck (1790-1867), Drake's associate, was for years probably the most popular American poet. His clear, lucid style, easy diction and good-natured raillery, appealed at once to the public sentiment, and gave him a temporary prestige in literary circles hardly equalled in our history. His odes, lyrics, and satires were the most polished of their kind, written in a strain at once to catch the popular fancy. Even those of a transient character, with allusions now for the most part of little interest, show the same graceful, poetic spirit that enlivens the more important works. He had that excellent command of language that enabled him to express his meaning in the most felicitous terms, without the slightest apparent effort. It is certainly no rash prediction to assert that his more familiar lyrics, though few in number, will last as long as any short poems in our literature.

Halleck's long poem "Fanny" is composed in a light, fanciful strain, satirizing the follies of New York's vulgar rich. It makes no pretensions to profundity or originality. The style is plainly suggestive of Beppo and Don Juan, though there is enough of Halleck's own to relieve it from any charge of imitation. Immediately upon its appearance in 1819 it was a pronounced success, so far as popularity may be considered a measure of literary success. The result was so gratifying to the author that two years later he published a new and enlarged edition, which, in spite of much that is ephemeral in the work, materially increased his reputation both at home and abroad. The thread of the narrative, suggested by the rise and failure of a New York merchant, is drawn out far beyond its legitimate length by local allusions and satirical flings at some of the literary and political notabilities of the time.

"For me  
I rhyme not for posterity,"

he says, an assertion which, so far as the author's longer poems are concerned, has proved true. Posterity takes little interest in either "Fanny" or "The Recorder," however great may have been the admiration elicited by them at the time of their appearance. But up to his time no American writer had approached his level in satiric verse, for though Halleck lived till 1867, his literary career may be considered as included within the single decade ending with 1828. It was during that period that his best work was done. Subsequent to that time he wrote nothing worthy of his genius. The monody on "Drake," "Burns," "Marco Bozzaris," and "Red Jacket," all written in the poets' early manhood, show not the fleeting spirit of the time,

but true inspiration. Their author's talents were greatly overrated by his earlier contemporaries. He was not an American Horace, nor was he a rival of Byron or Campbell, as some of his injudicious admirers would have us believe. But he wrote fine lyrics, and his writings afforded genuine pleasure to two generations of readers. He was the first American poet to receive distinguished honors after death. A monument was erected to his memory at his birthplace, Guilford, Conn., and it was highly appropriate that his bronze statue should grace New York's most beautiful park. He was, in spite of his New England birth, the typical poet of the metropolis. He sang of her virtues and her vices, her commerce and her politics, and it was but natural that New York should feel a local pride in his fame.

While "The Croakers" were amusing New York, another literary partnership was struggling for recognition. James W. Eastburn (1797-1819) and Robert C. Sands (1799-1832) were fellow-students at Columbia, fellow-editors of "The Moralist" and afterward of "Academic Recreations," and joint authors of "Yamoyden, A Poem." The latter was begun in 1817, and nearly finished the next year. After Eastburn's death, the work was revised and finished by Sands, and published in 1820. As the production of two youths, it shows crudeness and imperfect taste. The influence of Scott was apparent, and the choice of subject not a happy one. "Yamoyden" met with a qualified success in this country; received some attention abroad, and was grossly plagiarized in England. The "Proem" by Sands, in which he mourns the death of his associate, is better than anything in the poem itself.

This was the period of illustrated "annuals," Amer-

ica following in the wake of England and France in their adoption of the example set in the German "annalen." Many of the earlier productions of our greatest poets may be found in the "Amaranths," "Tokens," and other suggestively named collections. "Elam Bliss, a worthy member of the trade, mentioned a thing of the kind to Sands," says the latter's biographer, "who, after consulting with Verplanck and Bryant, hit upon the scheme of a yearly publication which should combine the characteristics of an annual with those of a miscellany from the pens of two or three authors writing in conjunction.

The joint labors of American artists and authors in 1827 resulted in the appearance of "The Talisman" for 1828. The publication was continued for three successive years, giving much of the best American literature during that period.<sup>1</sup> It was nominally under the editorship of a "Mr. Francis Herbert," whose only existence was in the fertile brains of the contributors.

It was as a humorist that Sands' genius was most conspicuous, though he would doubtless have resented the insinuation if he had been warned that his more trivial pleasantries would outlive his ambitious "Yamoyden" and "Papantzin." His essay on "Hoboken" is certainly much more genuine than his graver efforts. His literary jokes were of a kind not now so much in vogue. He delighted in mystifying his readers with extracts from a "forth-coming novel," a production as mythical as the accredited editor of "The Talisman." "One of these pranks," says his biographer,

<sup>1</sup> Out of this casual association of artists and literary men the "Sketch Club" arose. Its meetings were continued until it was merged in what is now "The Century Club," one of the largest and most prosperous clubs of the city.—Godwin's *Life of Bryant*, I. 236.

"occurred in relation to the Grecian crown of victory, during the excitement in favor of Greek liberty, when, after several ingenious young men, fresh from their college studies, had exhausted all the learning they could procure, either from their own acquaintance with antiquity or at second hand from Lempriere, Potter, Bartholemi, or the more erudite *Paschalis de Corona*, Sands ended the controversy by an essay filled with excellent learning, that rested mainly on a passage of Pausanias, quoted in the original Greek, but for which it is vain to look in any edition of that author." At another time he and his associate caused considerable controversy in an article relative to Pope Alexander VI. and Cæsar Borgia, and sent their disputant on "a fool's errand" to investigate a Latin work that never existed. Bryant, writing to Verplanck about this time, says: "You have doubtless seen the learned epistle of John Smith to the editors of the 'Evening Post.' The poems were concocted, as well as the greater part of the translations, by Sands and myself; some by Anderson, Paine, and Da Ponte. We look upon it here as a very learned *jeu d'esprit*." "The joke," says Godwin, "consisted in taking a familiar couplet and running it through all the languages, ancient and modern, inclusive of several Indian dialects. These quips and quirks were sometimes flung into the camps of political adversaries, where they exploded like fire-crackers, and produced a great deal of spluttering and noise, but not much damage."<sup>1</sup>

Sands' promising career was cut short when he was but thirty-three years old. The year 1832 was remarkable for its death list. This included such names as Goethe, Spurzheim, Champollion, Bentham, Cuvier, Scott,

<sup>1</sup> Life of Bryant, I. 239.



Crabbe, Adam Clarke, Charles Carroll, and the Duke of Reichstadt. It was in allusion to this that Sands wrote one of his best-known poems. A week later, he had just begun writing for the "Knickerbocker Magazine" a poem beginning with the significant words, —

"Oh, think not my spirit among you abides,"

when the pencil slipped from his hands forever. His muscles refused to obey his will, and he sank into a lethargy from which he never revived. Another honorable name was added to "The Dead of 1832."

In the year 1833 was published in Philadelphia a thin volume of poems dedicated to Edward Bulwer Lytton, as one "whose influence as an author is undeniably stronger, and more diffusive among the people of America, than that of almost any modern mind." This fulsome statement, in view of the influence of Wordsworth, Scott, and Byron, was of course absurd, but may be pardoned when we recall the fact that Bulwer himself had already referred to the author of the little book as a gentleman "who has an enviable genius, to be excited in a new and unexhausted country, and a glorious career before him, where, in manners, scenery, and morals, hitherto undescribed and unexhausted, he can find wells where he himself may be the first to drink." The recipient of this pleasant notice was Willis Gaylord Clark, at one time editor of "The Knickerbocker Magazine." Clark was a native of Onondaga County, New York, and early gave evidence of strong poetic taste. He was devoted to literature, followed journalism in New York City, Columbia, South Carolina, and Philadelphia, and was a frequent contributor to the English and American periodicals, more particularly to the "Knickerbocker," in which many of his

best productions appeared. Unhappily the "glorious career" which Bulwer predicted for him was cut short by death at the age of thirty-one. Nor was he the first to drink from the wells which he found in the unexhausted American soil. The themes of his verse are seldom original, dealing mostly with such subjects as the seasons of the year, memory, love, death, and the past. Like all the writings of the Knickerbocker school, his works are characterized by an easy grace, a tender pathos, and pleasing melody. He was of an earnest, religious temperament, and keenly alive to the beauties of nature. As Irving was his model in prose, Bryant was his model in verse, though Clark could hardly claim rivalry with either. His "Ollapodiana Papers," a series of fanciful sketches or essays contributed to the "Knickerbocker," are replete with humor, wisdom, tenderness, and good sense, though inclined to the sentimental.

The term "school," in relation to literature, applies strictly only to those writers of a similar cast of thought or method of expression. In its true and limited sense, therefore, the term "Knickerbocker school" should include only those writers who, like Paulding, Sands, Clark, and possibly Halleck, drew their chief inspiration from the prose of Washington Irving, the acknowledged leader. By custom, the term has been extended to all those New York writers who, in the first four decades of the nineteenth century, were identified with the literature of the metropolis.

Nothing better illustrates the "mutability of literature" than the obscurity which now veils so many names in the Knickerbocker group, at one time considered among the brightest. As late as 1841, Mr.

Griswold's exhaustive compilation of American poetry included about as many extracts from the two now well-nigh forgotten writers, Hoffman and Benjamin, as from those of Bryant, Longfellow, Whittier, Holmes, Poe, Emerson, and Lowell combined; and an English journal about the same time placed Hoffman in the front rank, declaring "his plume waved above the heads of all the literary men of America a cubit clear." Yet it is safe to say that of all the songs and lyrics of Charles Fenno Hoffman (1806-1884), only three are now remembered: "Sparkling and Bright," "Room, Boys, Room," and "At Monterey," the last being by far his best, and deservedly ranking among our finest martial lyrics. Hoffman was a genuine Knickerbocker, his family in New York dating back to the time of Peter Stuyvesant. He was a student, but not a graduate, of Columbia, and years after his college life received, at the same time with Halleck and Bryant, the honorary degree of A.M. from that institution.

The only American who could contest Hoffman's rank as a song writer was George P. Morris (1802-1864). In conjunction with Samuel Woodworth, Morris founded the "New York Mirror" in 1823, which for a quarter of a century continued to publish much of the most popular New York literature, and which was succeeded by the "Home Journal," for many years a leading literary and society journal of the metropolis. His drama "Briar Cliff," written in 1825, was a financial, if not a literary, success. He wrote also an opera, "The Maid of Saxony," which was produced for fourteen nights at the Park Theatre, — an unusual dramatic success for an American production, though it seems to have passed out of the public mind almost simultaneously with its disappearance from

the stage. His best-known poem, "Woodman, Spare that Tree," written in 1837, is said to have been translated into French, German, Spanish, Portuguese, Dutch, Latin and Greek. It is a fair exponent of its author's sentimentalism, which finds melodious expression in his other quondam popular productions: "My Mother's Bible," "Jennie Marsh of Cherry Valley," "Near the Lake where droops the Willow," and similar effusions. His early associate in the "Mirror," Samuel Woodworth (1785-1842), was also a prolific writer, though only a single lyric has survived out of his several volumes of prose and verse. The universal popularity of "The Old Oaken Bucket," like that of "Woodman, Spare that Tree," is one of those mysteries common in the history of literature. There is little of poetic merit in either. It was a sentimental era, which revelled in Gems, Albums, Amaranthine Wreaths, Tokens, Keepsakes, and Friendship's Offerings. "The Old Oaken Bucket" was an illustration of the tendency which is apt to infuse recollections of youthful life on the farm with a spirit more sentimental than accurate.

Park Benjamin was also a prolific short-poem writer. He was particularly successful in his sonnets, some of which show the true spirit. Of New England birth, as were the majority of the "Knickerbocker" authors, he exhibited a graceful turn for the gentle humor that characterized these writers. But all the minor New York singers seemed at one time in danger of being eclipsed by the vagaries of McDonald Clarke (1798-1842), a conspicuous figure in New York social and literary life. Between 1820 and 1841 he published several volumes of mingled sense and nonsense, and was known as "the mad poet." He carried the person-

alities of his society verse to such disagreeable extremes as to draw about his ears the wrath of the Manhattan belles. He was scouted, despised, and dreaded. Clarke was the author of the lines —

" Now twilight lets her curtain down,  
And pins it with a single star,"

once admired for their supposed beauty.

Without attempting to give an exhaustive list of the New York writers of this period, it is sufficient to recall the names of a few now almost forgotten, but prominent in their day and generation. Among these may be mentioned James G. Brooks (1801-1841), once considered a "leading American poet," who, with his wife, published in 1829 "The Rivals of Este and other Poems," William Leggett (1802-1839), journalist, C. P. Clinch (1797-1880), critic, and H. T. Tuckerman (1813-1871), essayist, each of whom made some pretensions to verse writing; I. S. Clason (1798-1834), who sought to imitate the life and writings of Byron, though destitute of a spark of his genius, author of two supplementary cantos of *Don Juan* (1826) and a volume of poems, "Horace in New York" (1827), and who died a miserable death in London; and Laughton Osborn (1809-1878), who graduated at Columbia in 1827, and wrote much but accomplished little.

In the field of satire, light pleasantry, and playful sentiment, these New York writers excelled. In sustained efforts of the heroic and tragic they failed dismally. Paulding's "Backwoodsman," Sands' "Papantzin" and "Yamoyden," and Brooks' "Rivals of Este" produced no important effect. Willis, in his "Melanie" and "Lord Ivon and his Daughter," fared little better. Yet Poe was probably right when he said Willis nar-

rowly missed placing himself at the head of American poets.

Nathaniel Parker Willis (1806-1867), while still at college, had made for himself a name as a poet, and had a national reputation years before Longfellow's first volume of verse was published. In his earlier career he was a frequent contributor to the sentimental "Annuals" of the period. In 1829, the year in which his first volume of poems appeared, he established at Boston "The American Monthly Magazine," which in September, 1831, was merged in "The New York Mirror." From that date until his death, thirty-six years later, Willis may be considered a New Yorker. The height of his fame was during the dozen years after he had settled in New York. In 1831 Halleck's literary career was virtually ended. Bryant's writings were in too exalted a strain to win immediate popular applause, and others who have since been regarded as our representative poets were then almost entirely unknown. The dash and glitter of Willis's writings took the popular fancy at once, and at an early age he was recognized as one of our "cleverest" poets.

Willis made little pretence in his poetry to admire the beauties of nature. Metropolitan society was far more agreeable to him than the voices of the woods, and he frankly acknowledged his preferences. He enjoyed the companionship of the cultured and refined, and disdained not the luxuries of life. His reception in Europe was something remarkable, and his countrymen have no sound reason to criticise his conduct abroad as a representative American man of the world. That he was something more than a mere dandy, J. G. Lockhart and Captain Marryat found to their cost when they attempted to measure swords with him. In that

not edifying controversy Willis certainly showed himself the best gentleman of the three. Lockhart's vulgar tirade in the "Quarterly" against Willis and all Americans, and Marryat's ill-expressed abuse in the "Metropolitan" are interesting chiefly as exhibiting the narrow prejudice of the Tory press at the time against anything emanating from this country. Marryat's blustering efforts to engage the young American in a duel only resulted in the Englishman's second conceding the error of his principal.

The verse of Willis, like his prose, provoked torrents of criticism, with the usual result. The more he was criticised, the more he was read, and what was not less to the purpose, the higher the price paid him for his manuscript. Satirists ridiculed his foppery, but he outlived the satirists. No American writer was more eagerly sought by the editors or more eagerly read by the public. His unfortunate choice of subjects, his diffusiveness, his flippancy, and what some regarded as his snobbishness, were matters with which the public concerned itself but little. He wrote to please, and succeeded. He struck a comparatively new vein in American poetry, and worked it to the utmost advantage. Whatever his faults, hypocrisy was not one of them. He detested the hard, barren realism of rural life, and refused to join the general chorus that was forever chanting the beauties of rustic simplicity.

" Your love in a cottage is hungry,  
 Your vine is a nest for flies —  
 Your milkmaid shocks the Graces,  
 And simplicity talks of pies !  
 You lie down to your shady slumber  
 And wake with a bug in your ear,  
 And your damsel that walks in the morning  
 Is shod like a mountaineer.

"True love is at home on a carpet,  
And mightily likes his ease —  
And true love has an eye for a dinner,  
And starves beneath shady trees.  
His wing is the fan of a lady,  
His foot's an invisible thing  
And his arrow is tipped with a jewel,  
And shot from a silver string."

All of which, if open to criticism as poetry, is still in refreshing contrast to the commonplace sentimentalism of "The Old Oaken Bucket," "Woodman, Spare that Tree" and "Near the Lake where droops the Willow."

In his contempt for the usual stock in trade of the minor American poets, however, Willis went to an extreme equally reprehensible, as evidenced by such vacuities as "To a Stolen Ring," "Sunrise Thoughts at the Close of a Ball," "An Apology for Avoiding, after a Long Separation, a Woman once Loved," "To the Lady in the Chemisette with Black Buttons," "The Lady in the White Dress whom I helped into the Omnibus," etc., etc., and he never outgrew the influence imbibed from the "Annual" literature of his youth. One of the last books that he published was a memento entitled "Thought Blossom."

The youthful literary triumphs of Willis were phenomenal. But they proved disastrous to his ultimate fame. He suffered, as he himself regretfully states, "by a reputation too early acquired." Writing in 1849, he declares that many of his poems "would have been very different could the popularity of the thought embodied in them have been foreseen, and time and pains given to make the vehicle more worthy of its freight. Mending them has been thought of; but the mending of well-known poetry with new verses shows



ill, as new pieces of mahogany in old furniture." With the frankness that was always one of his pleasantest traits, he has "no hesitation in acknowledging the pedestal on which public favor has placed him. He wishes that he could climb to it again by a better considered path, — by a path less accidental, indeed, for he has written from present feelings, or for present gain, and with no design upon the future." Regrets came too late. When he had attained the maturity of his powers a different class of writers had appeared, showing a degree of thought, imagination, and poetic power unapproachable by the laureate of society. In the closing years of his life, Willis produced nothing of permanent value. He belonged to a bygone era. The city and the nation had outgrown him, and he made no effort to keep abreast of the times. American thought was being schooled in the bitter experience of the years leading up to the great political conflict, and in the terrible earnestness of those years of debate and war there was no room for the dilettante. During the last twenty years of his life Willis was a literary nonentity.

The judgment which posterity — for as related to Willis's era, the present generation may be considered as posterity — has passed upon his writings is eminently just; many of his poems having been confessedly written "from present feelings or for present gain," Willis himself would have been the last to complain of the indifference of those to whom his personal feelings or personal gains are a matter of no importance whatever. Yet, while it is easy enough to criticise our poet for his daintiness and lack of masculinity, it is unjust to regard him as a mere worldling. He possessed no broad, general culture, indeed slight intellectual force,

and still slighter poetic imagination. But he gave us much of the best in his time. Many of his lines have become household phrases, and he unquestionably enriched our literature by contributing some of its best lighter lyrics. When occasion demanded, he could exhibit moral as well as physical courage. When reverses and misfortunes befell him, he showed a manly fortitude that must have surprised those who were constantly denouncing him as a dandy. Similarly in his literary work, he occasionally shows the possession of poetic faculties totally unapparent in his average verse. It is but fair to judge him by his best as well as his worst, and his best was very good. The term "Knickerbocker," as applied to the New York writers, is without any special significance. Irving, the acknowledged leader, had not a drop of "Knickerbocker" blood in his veins, and many of the less distinguished writers of this so-called "school" were of New England birth; but it was Irving's geniality and genius that gave literature a foothold in New York, and made it possible for other and less gifted writers to be appreciated. The "Salmagundi Papers" were the precursors of the "Croaker Papers" of Drake and Halleck. The influence of Irving's lighter prose is plainly traceable in the works of Paulding, Sands, and Clark. He was as much a "society man," in the best sense of the term, as Willis, with the additional merit of not permitting his head to be turned by the marked attentions of distinguished people abroad. The "Knickerbocker Magazine" was not established until 1833, and to its contributors, the term of "Knickerbocker writers" was applied as a matter of description rather than as a mark of literary distinction. But as "Knickerbocker" is inseparably connected with the name of Irving, the personification

of what at the time was recognized as the best in our literature, it was only natural that the title should be extended to that class of literature at all suggestive of the charms of the author of "Knickerbocker's New York."

As to the merits of the poetical writers of this group (always exclusive of Mr. Bryant), only a few words are necessary. Throughout all their works runs a similar strain of pleasant fancy, delicate humor, and tender pathos, gracefully and melodiously expressed, and presented in correct and proper form. Their writings are not profound, ambitious, or strikingly original. There are no "hidden meanings," no metaphysical subtleties, no strained intellectual conceits. The meanings, whatever they may be, are entirely upon the surface, though to stigmatize them as superficial is unjust. What American literature most needed at that period was a reaction from the inflated affectations of the preceding generation, which hailed the wearisome Dwight and Barlow as the Homer and Virgil of America. Respectable dulness required a sharp antidote, and this it found in the easy pleasantry of the "Knickerbocker writers."

It was once the fashion to sneer at these writers as echoes of the decadent Addisonian style in prose and the Byronic in poetry. The best of these authors were far from being mere imitators. The prevailing style was the easy grace of Irving, but to accuse them of an entire lack of originality betokens a strange ignorance of their achievements. A group that could boast of an Irving and a Cooper in its prose, and of a Halleck and a Willis in its verse, and that included Drake, Sands, Morris and Hoffman, Verplanck, Leggett, Francis, the Clarks, and many others, remembered

and forgotten, is not to be contemned for its performance. Its members were the first native writers to make elegant literature popular as such. Depending upon no adventitious aids of patriotism or propriety, but taking these for granted, they appealed simply to the more refined tastes. The poets considered in this chapter were as far below the singers that succeeded them as they were above the verse writers of the preceding period. As a connecting link between the old and the new, they were an indispensable factor in our literary growth. The "Knickerbocker writers" have been called "The Old Guard" of American literature. They are assuredly entitled to the credit due all intelligent pioneers who, rising superior to the chaotic conditions around them, have prepared the way for those that follow.

## CHAPTER IX

### *POETS OF SENTIMENT AND PASSION*

1815-1839

TO say that sentiment is essential to poetry is to state a truism. Without true sentiment the poetic faculty is impossible. Unless verse appeals to the higher feelings, it is idle to call it poetry. Sentiment has been defined as an echo of reason, "though sometimes better heard than reason itself." The bane of our singers eminent during this period was the absence of a rational judgment to control this feeling. This resulted in a tendency to echo the weaker notes of their English contemporaries. The sentiment of Byron and the simplicity of Wordsworth would not bear transplanting. The process ended in a puling sentimentalism or bald prosiness.

It was in the singularly productive literary soil of Connecticut that the sentimentalists of that period flourished. It would be a waste of effort to consider whether this was the natural reaction from the dull mechanical style of the Connecticut singers of the preceding generation. The fact remains that the metallic twang of the moral and political bards of that State was followed by the syrupy sweetness diluted from the imaginings of Hillhouse, Brainard, Percival, and Mrs. Sigourney. Much may be attributed to the literary taste then prevalent, but the essential principles of all art are not to be sacrificed to passing fashions. All

four of the writers named had ardent admirers in their time, but the traits that elicited such admiration are for the most part precisely those which a critical judgment would condemn.

The work by which James A. Hillhouse (1789-1841) is chiefly remembered, if he is remembered at all, is his so-called "sacred drama" of "Hadad," written in 1824. In this the agency of the supernatural is invoked. Among the *dramatis personæ* are not only such distinguished persons as David, Absalom, and Solomon, but also such euphoniously named individuals as Mephibosheth, Zadok, Benaiah, Ittia, Ahithophel, Hushai, Malcaiah, Balaam, Haddon, and Obil. "Hadad" is no worse than hundreds of other "sacred" dramas. The fault lies in the theme. Modern taste instinctively resents the use of such agencies in literature as are here resorted to, especially when an attempt is made to shirk the responsibility on the Scriptures. Yet there is enough merit in the work to cause regret that the poet's powers were so misapplied.

While Hillhouse found his favorite themes in far-off lands and times, another Connecticut poet was tuning his pastoral pipe to woodland lays and lyrics of his native State. John G. C. Brainard (1796-1828) wrote in pleasing verse of the streams and legends of Connecticut, but when he attempted higher flights, he failed. He was among the earliest of our poets who idealized American scenery. This is no slight thing to say of a poet who died before he was thirty-two years old.

The year 1821 was a remarkable one in our literary annals. Irving's "Sketch Book" had just been published in complete form, soon to be followed by "Bracebridge Hall." In the same year appeared Cooper's "Spy," Dana's "Idle Man," Miss Sedgwick's

"New England Tale," Halleck's first book, "Fanny," the first collective edition of Bryant's poems since his childhood, and the first volume of verse by James G. Percival. It was in some respects an initial year for American poetry. No volume of native poetry had approached the standard of Mr. Bryant's unpretentious little book. Halleck's "Fanny" retained its popularity for years. It seemed as if the day of small and mean things in our poetic literature had ended. If we were to continue to imitate, the imitation was something more than mere paraphrase of English models.

The welcome extended these volumes was most cordial. Even the young Percival had no just cause to find fault with his reception, though he complained of the indifference of the public and its lack of judgment in not keeping itself in a state of perpetual ecstasy over his poems.

James Gates Percival (1795-1856) was one of those unhappy mortals that never can get the sentimental nonsense shaken out of them by even the roughest contact with the world. He was bound to take a despairing view of everything. No amount of worldly success could persuade him to be cheerful. He was determined to write, and when he found that people read and rather liked his poetry, he vowed that he would write no more. It is needless to add, these oft-repeated vows of silence were broken whenever circumstances seemed to justify. Then, because he was not exalted to a pinnacle higher than that occupied by a Byron or a Moore, the reading public was denounced for its sordid taste.

It was the fashion for sentimentalists to bewail in Byronic verse the degeneration of all things. Percival gave full rein to his gloomy fancies. His poem, "The

✓ Suicide," which filled twelve dreary pages of the magazine in which it first appeared, was simply a reflex of his own lugubrious spirit. His style is diffuse, diluted, verbose. [The importance which he attaches to his own feelings and impressions becomes tedious in its solemn absurdity. His closest approximations to cheerfulness are when he is chanting of death and disease.]

The work by which Percival hoped to immortalize himself was the long meditative monologue, "Prometheus," a poem in two parts, published in 1821 and 1822. This is a despairing wail over the woes of humanity and the vanity of worldly aspirations. Few to-day would care to read through the hundred and twenty-five pages filled by this poem.

To deny to Percival all claims to poetic ability would be unjust. In spite of his Byronic tendencies, there is a nervous power in his verse that places him far above the majority of his predecessors. His fancies pour forth in a tumultuous flood that bewilders more than it pleases the reader. But some of his lighter pieces, like "The Coral Grove," show the delicacy of his fancy when not clouded by his constitutional melancholy. His "May" and "Seneca Lake" fully deserve the wide circulation which they enjoyed. His descriptions of the beauties of nature are often poetic in the highest degree, and some of his lyrics, like "The Eagle" and "New England," have the true ring. The bulk of his verse, however, is of a kind that never will reach the popular heart; not that the spirit of his poetry is too profound for ordinary comprehension, but because of its lack of sympathy with popular interests. Nothing better illustrates the poverty of our early literature than the comparative excellence of his poetry.



Nothing better illustrates the gratifying growth of that literature than the overshadowing of his poetry by the works of younger writers, almost unknown when Percival was dazzling his countrymen with his Promethean fires. When he met his melancholy death in an obscure Wisconsin village, his poetic reputation was on the wane.

To the period under review properly belongs a prolific writer, who, though oblivion is fast overshadowing her fame, was in her day the most widely read American female poet. There is absolutely nothing of any high order of merit in her poems. Her books were legion, and her fame international. Lydia Huntley Sigourney (1791-1865) began writing verses in 1798, and was still writing in 1865. In fact the issuance of volumes from her fertile pen ceased not with her life; for in 1866 was published her posthumous work, "Letters of Life." In the last-named book she confesses responsibility for forty-six different works, "besides more than two thousand articles in prose and verse," contributed to nearly three hundred periodicals. Her works were read and admired in Europe, and as a token of esteem in which she was held as woman and author, she was presented by the Queen of France with a diamond necklace. ✓

Mrs. Sigourney was a native of Norwich, but with the exception of a European trip in 1840, was for more than half a century a resident of Hartford. It was in the latter city that for several years before her marriage she taught what was called "a select class of young ladies," and it must be confessed that most of her poetry is of the prim and placid character adapted to the comprehension of the budding female mind. She made her literary début in 1815, when she published her volume,

"Moral Pieces in Prose and Verse," a title applicable to the great bulk of her work, including the "more than two thousand pieces contributed to nearly three hundred periodicals." Her "Traits of the Aborigines of America," a poem in five cantos, appeared in 1822. This was followed by her "Letters to Young Ladies," which passed through at least twenty American and five English editions, and "Letters to Mothers," which likewise passed through a number of English and American editions.

✓ The one great characteristic of Mrs. Sigourney's verse is its uniform propriety. It is pure, chaste, and insipid, highly moral but lowly poetical. A writer in "Blackwood" said: "Mrs. Sigourney has been called by the affectionate admiration of her countryman 'The American Hemans,' and she is rightly so called, inasmuch as she is the best of all their poetesses."<sup>1</sup> This in view of the paucity of our female singers at the time may seem equivocal praise; but it was undeniably true.

It was in the class of verse commonly called "occasional" that our songstress particularly distinguished herself. She was in constant demand for "lines," or "a sentiment," or "stanzas" to grace every sort of gathering. To her credit, it is to be said that she never refused to contribute of her talents in the furtherance of any praiseworthy cause. It was her versatility in this direction that elicited such admiration from Miss Edgeworth. In looking over Mrs. Sigourney's poems, we find there transitory effusions inspired by such exhilarating "occasions" as "Scene at the Death Bed of Rev. Dr. Payson," "The Death of Garafilia Mohalbi," etc. She could also sing enthusiastically of

<sup>1</sup> Blackwood's Magazine, May, 1834, p. 807.

the "Power of Maternal Piety," as well as of "Missions" and "The Sunday School." Her poetic fancy could descry the "bright wing'd paroquet" where the "swoln waters of the Illinois" are "dashing against the shores." She could refer to Niagara's "glorious robe," the "insect trump of earthly hope," "ambition's thunder claim," "dove-eyed meekness," and "bland charity."

In her more sentimental moods she could write "Recollections of an aged Pastor," "Musing Thoughts," "Burial of the Young," "Death of an Infant," and "To the Moon." It is not surprising that her conception of the American savage should be that of a pure sentimentalist.

In writing the simple legends and describing the natural scenery of her native land, Mrs. Sigourney did her best work, though she did not disdain to compose ballads of the olden time and to celebrate the beauties of foreign climes. [Her "Alpine Flowers" is peculiarly representative of her style, at once feeble and aspiring.] It was of this poem that Dr. George B. Cheever once wrote: "This piece is, perhaps, the finest of Mrs. Sigourney's poetry. It is in some respects so sublime that it forcibly reminds us of Coleridge's 'Hymn before Sunrise in the Vale of Chamouny.'"

It is not easy for the present generation to sympathize with the admiration once extended to the poetry of this estimable lady. Much of this admiration was doubtless due to the beauty of her personal character. Her whole career was one of devoted self-sacrifice. Forced to earn a livelihood while still a sensitive girl, she bore her fate as submissively as when in after years she sought to retrieve her husband's broken fortunes by the labors of her heart and brain. She

toiled incessantly for others while denying to herself many of what are considered the necessities of life. The benisons of the poor, the needy, the sick, and the infirm were frequently her sole reward. While herself aspiring to the highest ideals in life, no creature was too lowly or too humble, or too despised to excite her sympathies. The slave and the savage, the outcast and the convict found in her a generous friend. She wrought for the amelioration of her race, freedom for the slave, reform for the criminal and the drunkard, aid for the fallen, and an exalted standard of morality in every-day affairs. It was no wonder that her strong personality cast its influence over so many. Her heroic life of duty and self-denial was her noblest poem.

While the Connecticut of this era was the fruitful mother of sentimentalism, she was not alone in this distinction. Massachusetts gave us one female singer who in the "poetry of passion" excelled all her American contemporaries. She essayed a bolder flight, and evinced a decidedly more pronounced and voluptuous tone and spirit than her amiable Connecticut sister would have dared to show. Very different from the feeble platitudes and placid moralizings of Mrs. Sigourney was the fervid, impassioned romancing of Mrs. Maria Gowen Brooks (1795-1846).

The American reputation of Mrs. Brooks seems to have been chiefly a reflex of her English fame, which in turn was due to the efforts of Southey. It was he who bestowed upon her the sentimental pseudonym of "Maria del Occidente," by which she continued to be known. Southey's oft-quoted tribute to her as "the most impassioned and most imaginative of all poetesses," has preserved her name from oblivion, even though her works were little read at any time.

The subject of her long poem, "Zophiel," was suggested by the story of Sara in the apocryphal book of Tobit. The incidents turn upon the love of a fallen angel, Zophiel, for a beautiful and passively lovely Hebrew maiden.

It would be a profitless task to attempt even a synopsis of the six long cantos. Amid much that is strained, overdrawn, and obscure, in this strange jumble of classic and oriental mythology, is an occasional passage that narrowly misses being beautiful. But the whole performance is marred by a constant striving for effect, a lavish display of second-hand learning, and a vague intensity of feeling that verges on the absurd.

The poetess, in her liberality, combines the legendary lore of the Greeks and Romans, Jews and Mahomedans indiscriminately, with a preference for the Hebrew traditions.

It is difficult to find any of our narrative verse of that day that was not either dull or absurd. The American Indian had been done to death in numberless epics and dramas. Even Zophiel is a relief after the Tecumsehs and Powhattans that were being constantly paraded before the reading public. Mrs. Brooks' poem, with its air of Oriental mysticism and mystery, was no more false to nature than were the impossible creations of those who were determined to force upon us a poetic literature whose sole claims to merit rested in its alleged nationalism. With all its defects, Mrs. Brooks' work will always enjoy the credit of being the first considerable poem with creative power composed by an American woman.

Frequent comment has been made upon the frantic attempts of our earlier writers to produce something, no matter what, that should be purely and distinc-

tively American. Nothing better illustrates our conscious provincialism than these strained efforts. From the days of Dwight and Barlow, our early poets were incessantly worrying themselves to furnish something entirely different from anything that had preceded. Indio-mania and Anglo-phobia, with an occasional attempt to idealize Columbus, were considered the indispensable ingredients of American poetry and romance. Even Mrs. Brooks, at the time of her death, was engaged upon a portentous epic entitled "Beatriz, the Beloved of Columbus," which happily was not published. Our literary shores are strewn with the driftwood of these unlucky ventures. A cursory survey of this period will disclose a few of these wrecks, the majority of which have long since been engulfed in the sea of oblivion. Among them will be found "The Frantic Maid, or the Fall of Wyoming, a Poem in Five Cantos," 1819; "Logan, an Indian Tale," by Samuel Webber, 1821; "The Land of Powhattan, a Poem by a Virginian," 1821; "Ontwa, the Son of the Forest," 1822; "The Fall of Itwibide, or Mexico Delivered, a Tragedy of Five Acts," 1823; "Waltham, an American Revolutionary Tale, in Three Cantos," 1823; "Escalala, an American Tale," 1824; "Mengue, a Tale of the Frontier," 1825; "The Graves of the Indians," 1827, and "The Fredoniad, or Independence Preserved, an Epic Poem of the Late War," in four duodecimo volumes, by Richard Emmons, 1827.

The list might be prolonged down to the middle of the century. These few are mentioned to show the pertinacious industry of our earlier versifiers to help build up a truly national literature. The germs of a genuine literature had already begun to develop, but they were too simple and unpretentious to suit the

soaring ambitions of these bookmakers. There is something formidable in the amount of misdirected energy displayed in these epics of mingled sentimentalism, dramatic passion, and verbose patriotism. In 1820 Sidney Smith had given his fling at American literature, and the bulk of material then and immediately thereafter issuing from our printing-presses seemed a justification for the bitter taunt. There seemed to be a preconcerted plan to prove that if in the four quarters of the globe nobody ever read an American book, it should not be for lack of opportunity. In reality all these efforts at originality were the most transparent of imitations. Their heroes and heroines, subjects and plots, were but revivals of worn-out European models transferred to American surroundings.

Smith's gibe cut deep. It was ungenerous, and to a certain extent untrue. Yet that there was some foundation for the famous interrogatory was proved by our indiscriminate attempts to evade it. In 1823 John Neal (1793-1876), the spasmodic poet and novelist, made a voyage to England with the avowed purpose of answering the question, "Who reads an American Book?" It was in great measure owing to his vigorous articles in "Blackwood's" that the British mind was brought to recognize the existence of a nascent literature on this side of the ocean. Among other matters that he duly impressed upon the British public was the prominent position of John Neal in the American world of letters.

This versatile writer was born at Portland, of a Quaker family. He was read out of the brotherhood, according to his own statement, for sundry un-Quaker-like misdemeanors, among other things, for writing a

tragedy. He was self-educated, and embarked in commercial and professional pursuits without very marked degree of success. In 1818 he published at Baltimore his "Battle of Niagara, a Poem without Notes." His tragedy of "Otho" appeared about the same time. He modestly refers to these as "containing altogether more sincere poetry, more exalted, original, pure poetry than all the works of all the other authors that have ever appeared in America." As similar claims had been made on behalf of at least a score of other American poets, there is nothing especially significant in Neal's pretensions. He was one of the most prolific of writers, the amount of his prose greatly overshadowing that of his poetry. He published his first book in 1817, and his last in 1869; and he proudly refers to the fact that within twelve years of that period he had published the equivalent of fifty English duodecimo volumes. Neal himself would doubtless have resented with scorn the imputation of being a poet of sentiment or passion. In spite of his assumed brusqueness, there was a strong tinge of sentimentalism in his nature, and he was strongly influenced by Byron.

The chief service rendered by Neal to American poetry was purely incidental. It was to John Neal that the unhappy Poe, then twenty years old, poor and despondent, appealed for advice. Neal recognized the merit in the immature efforts of the young poet and encouraged him to persevere.

Among many voices long since hushed a few tuneful notes are discernible, showing that the spirit of song was still fluttering even amid discouraging surroundings. During this period the South contributed several minor singers, who hardly deserved the fate that consigned them to an early oblivion. As the "Puri-



tanic influence in the South was the slightest, we should naturally look for a lighter, gayer spirit than that manifested at the North. It is true her singers generally exhibited a certain sadness of tone, but as our greatest lyrist, himself a Southerner by choice though not by birth, attempted to show, sadness is in a limited sense one of the essentials of beauty.

Of these Southern singers one of the earliest to contribute to the foundations of our literature was Richard Dabney (1787-1825). This ill-fated poet was a native of Louisa County, Virginia, where he died. He printed in 1812 his first volume of poems, which received but little recognition. Three years later he published his "Poems, Original and Selected." This was a little more fortunate, attracting some notice even across the sea. His lines on "Youth and Age," still frequently printed, are from his longest work, with the not very attractive title, "Illustrations of Simple Moral Emotions." This is a versified metaphysical treatise on the human passions. It is not so much one poem as a series of poems, whose general tenor, as the author expresses it, "entitles them to the denomination of *Gnomique*, — a character of poetic composition, where the expression is limited to prominent and concise associations, in the train of thought, consequent on any simple emotion of taste, so as, by the preservation of unity, to prevent the force of that emotion from being diminished." The whole performance is a melancholy one. His lighter lyrics, "A Western War Song," "The Heroes of the West," and "Turn not to the East," though crude, show something of awakening national spirit.

In 1816 another Virginian, William Maxwell (1782-1857), printed his small volume of verse. His poetry

is not remarkable except as being in a strain different from that of the majority of his American contemporaries. His "Ariadne to Theseus" shows his attachment to the pseudo-classic. This and some of his shorter pieces, like "Love and Beauty" and "Pleasure and Love," are among the earliest American echoes of the so-called French school. The chief distinction of these two writers rests on the ground of priority. They were the earliest Southern singers of note, though their fame was hardly national. There was one lyric written by a Southerner during this period, however, which has deservedly become an American classic.

That anything of sufficient merit to give rise to controversy should be produced in American poetry at the beginning of this period, was in itself significant. The three stanzas composing the song "My Life is like the Summer Rose" attained a degree of popularity unknown at that time in Southern literature. These "Stanzas" were not the work of a "single-poem-writer," for the author wrote other finished and beautiful short poems that have been undeservedly forgotten.

Richard Henry Wilde (1789-1847) was a native of Ireland, but became an American when seven years old. After a long and useful public career, he spent several years abroad, devoting himself especially to Italian literature, and made his celebrated discovery of Giotto's lost portrait of Dante. The song referred to was published as early as 1815, was set to music and many times reprinted. It became a favorite, and in due time was the subject of one of the literary hoaxes of the century. Mr. Anthony Barclay of Savannah, for his own amusement, wrote a Greek translation of it, whereupon a certain wiseacre in "The North American

Review" astonished the literary world by proving beyond a doubt that Wilde had plagiarized his pretty little poem from the writings of Alcaeus. In 1871 the Georgia Historical Society published Mr. Barclay's "Authentic Account of Mr. Wilde's Alleged Plagiarism," admitting the origin of the supposed Greek lyric.

The song was introduced as part of an intended epic of Florida, and known as "The Lament of the Captive," said to have been suggested by the story of Juan Orteiz, sole survivor of the expedition of Panfilo de Narvaez. The epic was published as a fragment.

There was but one other Southern poet of this period at all comparable to Wilde. Edward Coate Pinkney (1802-1828), of Maryland, published in 1825 a slim volume of poems, containing a few lyrics worthy to live. His little poem, "A Health," has had an extensive circulation by reason of the prominence given to it by Poe in his essay on "The Poetic Principle." As a song writer, Pinkney deserves high rank. Though he never received the popular recognition awarded to the New Yorkers, Hoffman and Morris, as song writers, the little that he did accomplish in his short lifetime was very good. That his writings were, however, in some degree appreciated, is shown by the fact that a new edition of his poems was published in 1838, and, with an introductory notice by Willis, again in 1844.

Religious poetry, as the highest expression of man's spiritual nature, must always occupy an important place in literature. The writers who gave directing power to our earlier poetry were distinctively of the religious class. Yet America has not produced a Heber or a Keble. The religious poems of Doane, Muhlenberg, and Croswell breathe a pure, sincere spirit, utterly free from cant and pietism. But their impression upon our

literature was unimportant. The same may be said of the works of the prolific writer, W. B. Tappan (1794-1849), author of several volumes more remarkable for their piety than their poetry.

There was one profoundly religious poet of this period, however, who, from a dreary waste of moral platitudes, occasionally surprises the reader by a bit of imaginative description, whose effect is like that of a spring in a desert. Carlos Wilcox (1794-1827) left two incomplete poems, — "The Age of Benevolence," in blank verse, and "The Religion of Taste," in Spenserian stanzas. A poet must be judged by his works, and not by his promise. Wilcox wrote sufficiently to show how hopelessly confused were his notions of true poetry. Also he wrote sufficiently to show his fine perception of the beauties of nature. He was gifted with good descriptive powers, and appears at his best in treating of the American landscape. Frequently he seems to anticipate Bryant, feebly indeed, but sufficiently to suggest some of the later written lines of the better known poet. But such work is too rare to be regarded as characteristic. Wilcox's verse is chiefly metrical moralizing, and was very appropriately bound in with his prose sermons.

Among the first to yield to the magnetic charms of Robert Burns was Robert Dinsmore (1757-1836), "The Rustic Bard," a native of Windham, New Hampshire. In 1828 he published, at Haverhill, his "Incidental Poems," composed in great part in the dialect of the locality where he was born and bred. This dialect had been introduced into that section by some Scotch-Irish immigrants in 1719, and for more than a century was the vernacular of that region. In this limited sense it may be considered in Dinsmore's time as truly

American. Unreadable as Dinsmore's poems are, their author may be fairly regarded as an early pioneer in that class of literature now grown so tediously familiar under the general designation of "dialect verse."

Without the slightest pretension to presenting an exhaustive list of those who were crowding the singing ranks during this time, reference may be made to such vanishing and vanished celebrities as Grenville Mellen (1799-1841), who wrote enough to show that he could have done creditable work; Lincoln Sumner Fairfield (1803-1844), who wrote a formidable number of poems on ambitious themes, and who to his dying day insisted that his "Last Night in Pompeii," published in 1832, was the source of Bulwer's celebrated novel which appeared two years later; Rufus Dawes (1803-1859), who began his literary career as a disciple of Byron and ended it as a follower of Swedenborg; James Nack (1809-1879), the deaf and dumb poet, author of "The Legend of the Rocks" (1827), and later volumes; and George D. Prentice (1802-1870), who was a true poet, but whose muse was ruthlessly thrust aside to meet the requirements of successful journalism. These and many others equally entitled to mention, would have been considered great poets in the preceding generation. In the rank and file of our literary workers they did good service. Their labors were not in vain, slight as has been their poetic fame. They were not great singers, but they helped to swell the tuneful chorus. Searching criticism of their writings is uncalled for. Let us tender to their memories the just tribute of gratitude for what they did, without being too captious as to their acknowledged limitations.

The period under review, embracing about a quarter

of a century, marked the transition from the mechanical and artificial to the creative and natural. The suggestions of artistic spirit, of imaginative force, or creative power, were feeble indeed, but their presence was manifest, their influence felt. The perfunctory epics and Della Cruscan echoes of the preceding period had given place to the works of Allston, Dana, and Pierpont, Drake, Halleck, and Willis. The change was not sufficient to betoken a national literature in full development, but it was certainly an advance. With a few exceptions, our verse-writers of this period were greatly overrated by their admirers. The reaction has been equally pronounced. Extravagant adulation has given place to a frigid indifference, and much that was really commendable and worthy of permanence has suffered unmerited neglect. Few indeed are the singers of any age whose songs are remembered by the succeeding generation. The poets that we have just been considering were pioneers in our literature, but it is not priority alone that entitles their best works to favorable consideration. Theirs were the voices crying in the wilderness of a provincial, utilitarian, and self-absorbed age. Though constantly boasting of our national greatness, we were absurdly sensitive to criticism. An American poetaster's cup of bliss was full if his works were favorably criticised in an English review. Trans-Atlantic favor was regarded as a foreshadowing of posthumous fame. Should the British critic, however, refer disparagingly to any American work, our national heart was instantly fired by suggestions of Bunker Hill, Valley Forge, and Yorktown, as affording conclusive reasons for the impossibility of British justice to American literature. This sensitiveness to foreign opinion indicates how little, even in the

second generation after the revolution, we had outgrown our provincialism.) In this respect our poets were not much better than the rest of the people. Nor had we yet become entirely emancipated from the Puritanic prejudice against abstract beauty and all the finer elegances of life that did not tend to intensely practical ends. Herein our nascent literature was doing a noble work. The influence of our best writers in helping to refine and elevate our crude tastes and prejudices cannot be over-estimated. But it was in quite another direction that American verse was beginning to assume a decidedly characteristic strain. The great social and political controversy of the day affected poetry as well as every other form of our literature. In the sacrifice of truth and justice to considerations of expediency, the national conscience was becoming debauched. Then, as in pre-Revolutionary days, the spirit of song rose clear and distinct above the strifes of faction, and warned us that there were higher ideals in life than bare material prosperity. On the walls of his cell in the Baltimore jail, William Lloyd Garrison, in 1830, had inscribed his now celebrated sonnet, one of the first successful attempts to embody the true American spirit in that form of verse. The ringing strains of Pierpont anticipated the stirring notes of Lowell, and already the young Whittier had signaled his entrance upon manhood by branding in words of fire the nation's shame. Unheeding indeed were the ears upon which fell these earliest protests. Yet not many years elapsed before we learned that the men who were then being imprisoned, mobbed, and persecuted, were the real prophets of the people. The history of the anti-slavery conflict is too closely interwoven with that of our literature to be entirely ignored even

in its earlier stages. Reference is made to it here simply as one of the shaping forces of much that was best in the minor verse of a later period.

In view of the amount produced during those years, the actual results are meagre enough. Out of the torrent of epics, tragedies, metrical romances, and descriptive verse of every name and nature, it is safe to say that but two narrative poems, Drake's "Culprit Fay" and Dana's "Buccaneer," have obtained a permanent place in literature. But few short poems have survived half a century, — Payne's "Home, Sweet Home," Wilde's "Stanzas," Drake's "American Flag," Pierpont's "Passing Away," Halleck's "Marco Bozzaris," "Burns," and monody on Drake, and a few lyrics of Willis, Sprague, Pinkney, Hoffman, and Morris, would very nearly complete the list of short poems whose popularity was at all commensurate with their merits.

Yet even these were sufficient to indicate that our literature had passed the germinal stage, and was becoming productive. Far above all was the genius that could produce for us the simple but majestic strains of "Thanatopsis," "A Forest Hymn," and "The Prairies." It was the happy fate of the Nestor of American poets, not only to produce the noblest poem that had yet been written by an American, but for more than half a century thereafter to witness the full development of our national poetry as embodied in the works of himself and his younger compeers. Had Bryant written nothing later than 1839, he would still have been entitled to an honorable rank in our literature. His life work extended for nearly thirty-nine years after that date, and much of his best work was produced after the appearance of Longfellow's first volume of original verse. It



is with a sense of relief, not unmodified, perhaps, with a feeling of decorous regret, that we take leave of the period of respectable mediocrity. We have traversed the arid fields of colonial endeavor, witnessed the germinal developments of the Revolutionary period, and the earliest products of our assured national career. Before us stretch the fair gardens of nobler achievement. At the portals stands the honored master who gathered wisdom from the forest shades and sang the beauties of the natural world. Reverently but gladly let us approach, and take to heart the lesson of life exemplified in his words and works.

## CHAPTER X

### *POEMS OF NATURE AND AMERICAN LIFE*

1817-1870

AMERICAN poetry, as generally understood, had its birth in a contemplation on death. There was nothing incongruous in this. The general tendency of American verse, before it became poetry, had been toward the solemn and mournful. It may be a literary conceit, but it is worth a passing thought, that the theologic elegies of the Puritans, and the counterfeit heroics of their successors, were destined to culminate in these grandly sonorous lines upon death. The effect of the sudden appearance of such a production as "Thanatopsis" in our literary desert was much as if a classic temple had been exorcised from the wilderness by the strains of a new Amphion. It was as if an architecturally perfect Egyptian palace of the dead had sprung up in a frontier settlement dwarfing and humbling all surrounding objects. The poem was composed during the summer after its author had withdrawn from college. It was the impressive lesson breathed into his soul by the whispering trees, the dying leaves, and the mouldering soil of the forest. This exalted strain, contemplative of the future as dispassionately as of the past, seems in its majestic music like the requiem mass of humanity.

At the time of the poet's birth, and for years afterward, Pope and Cowper, as poets, were more esteemed

in America than were Homer and Shakespeare. Bryant himself, in his first volume of youthful verse, betrayed his allegiance to prevailing fashions. These boyish effusions were properly suppressed, having no permanent value save as illustrating the author's mental development.

The real literary life of William Cullen Bryant (1794-1878) began in 1811, when he surreptitiously jotted down his reflections on death. These were kept concealed for six years before their appearance in "The North American Review" for September, 1817. The same number of the "Review" contained other lines by the young poet, called "A Fragment," but now entitled "Inscription for the Entrance to a Wood." This was written four years later than "Thanatopsis," and in the same exalted strain. These two pieces were the highest order of original poetry that had yet appeared in America. American poetry was born. Would it mature, or was it doomed to an early blight, chilled by popular indifference? As became a young nation, our first true songs were the voices of nature. Would those voices find an audience, or would they be stifled and hushed amid the contentions of more pressing and aggressive duties?

Young "Cullen," when not holding communion with the "visible forms" of nature, studied law, was duly admitted to the bar, and determined to try his fortune in the neighboring village of Plainfield, Mass. Alone and on foot, the young barrister left Cummington on his little journey of seven miles over the mountains, his sole capital consisting in an ordinary education, a shy, sensitive disposition, and a stout heart. It is no wonder, as he left his father's roof on the 15th of December, 1815, that he suffered some misgivings.

He felt, as he expressed it, very forlorn and desolate indeed, not knowing what was to become of him "in the big world, which grew bigger as he ascended, and yet darker with the coming on of night." A lonely bird flitting across the landscape attracted his attention. The winged wanderer awoke a sympathetic chord in the mind of the traveller, suggesting a few lines which, as soon as he arrived at his future home, were transcribed to paper. The "Waterfowl" had soared into lasting fame, and inspired one of the noblest didactic poems in literature. The sublime faith indicated in the last stanza of the poem never forsook the poet "in the long way" that he had to tread from rural obscurity to the eminent position of New York's most distinguished citizen, whom Lincoln declared it worth a journey East to see. At the first appearance of the poem in England, young Hartley Coleridge pronounced it "the best short poem in the English language," an opinion in a measure shared by Matthew Arnold.<sup>1</sup>

But the young man's heart was not in his profession. Neither Plainfield nor Great Barrington in Berkshire satisfied his longings. Frequently would he "steal an hour from study and care," and in the haunts of nature seek the solace hardly to be looked for in a country law office. As a result Green River rippled into song, and preserved the record of the singer's discontent.

The favorable reception awarded Bryant's efforts by those most competent to judge, as well as his growing distaste for his profession, seemed to foreshadow a literary career. He remained in Great Barrington four years after the publication of his first book in 1821. During that time he continued to write his poems chiefly as contributions to Dana's "Idle Man," "The

<sup>1</sup> Bigelow's *Life of Bryant*, p. 43.

New York Review," and "The United States Literary Gazette." The poet's powers were unfolding. He essayed a broader range, if not a higher flight. Each one of the poems written during his Berkshire life has its acknowledged place in our literature. The Muse had fairly claimed him as her own, and the law exerted its charms in vain. Bryant bade farewell to his simple rural life and gladly availed himself of an offer on the editorial staff of "The New York Review," afterwards merged in "The United States Review." It was not an auspicious period for literary magazines, though under Mr. Bryant's leadership "The Review" rendered excellent service to our literature. Says Mr. Parke Godwin:—

"Dana also contributed to it his best things, 'The Dying Raven,' 'Fragments of an Epistle,' 'The Husband and Wife's Grave,' and 'The Little Beach Bird.' It introduced to the public Halleck's 'Marco Bozzaris,' 'Burns,' 'Wyoming,' and 'Connecticut' (the three last after it was changed to 'The United States Review'), which are his best: several of the earlier efforts of Longfellow, which however were not his best, and of N. P. Willis who wrote under the name of Roy. Mr. George Bancroft, since eminent as an historian, aspired to poetry then, and translated for it from Goethe and Schiller, and Mr. Caleb Cushing opened his varied career in it by gentle flirtations with the Italian Muses." <sup>1</sup>

After Bryant had formed his connection with "The Evening Post" (1828) he continued to publish his verse at intervals. His arduous duties as journalist and public-spirited citizen only enhanced his loyalty to nature. It is customary among certain critics to speak of Bryant's mind as narrow and deep. He was, in fact, the broadest-minded of men. Nothing that

<sup>1</sup> Godwin's Life of Bryant, I. 226.

interested humanity was alien to him. In all his literary, political, and philanthropical labors he was intensely in earnest. He despised insincerity. As a poet, he sang of nature's beauties and her teachings, of the pure affections, of love of home and country and all the higher aims of life. As a man, he exemplified his poetry. While as a poet he denounced tyranny in the abstract, as a journalist he fought it in the concrete as represented in American slavery and vicious politics. Though with him the functions of the poet and editor were always distinct, they were really complementary of each other. From his lofty height he caught the messages of nature and transmitted them to earth. In his practical every-day life he sought to inculcate the highest ideals, and through all the pretences and artificialisms of current politics and social life, to lead back to first principles of human brotherhood and the inherent rights of man.

Washington Irving, in his dedication to Samuel Rogers of an English edition of Bryant's poems, refers to the essentially American character of the poet's writings, — his descriptions of the solemn primeval forest, the shores of the lonely lake, "the banks of the wild and nameless stream," and "the rocky upland, rising like a promontory from amidst a wide ocean of foliage, while they shed around us the glories of a climate fierce in its extremes but splendid in all its vicissitudes." "Neither, I am convinced," adds Mr. Irving, "will it be the least of his merits in your eyes that his writings are imbued with the independent spirit and the buoyant aspirations incident to a youthful, a free, and a rising country."<sup>1</sup>

Because Bryant was the poet of nature, he was also

<sup>1</sup> Irving's edition of Bryant's Poems, p. v, London, 1832.

the poet of freedom. Despotism in any form appeared to him contrary to nature's laws, and therefore despicable. Struggling patriots, whether in Greece, Italy, or America, found in him a ready champion. This, as well as his ideal descriptions of American scenery, characterizes him as a notably national poet. But above and beyond all, he was nature's evangelist to man. He caught the spirit of the messages whispered by the trees, sung by the rivers and chanted by the sea. Trees and flowers, the forest and the prairies, the clouds, the sky and the stars, the sea, the tides, and the winds, the thunder-storm and the hurricane, spoke to him a "various language," which he interpreted to his fellow-men. To use his own words,—

"Each brought in turn,  
Some truth, some lesson on the life of man,  
Or recognition of the eternal mind  
Who veils his glory with the elements."

To him the groves were "God's first temples." The evening wind was "God's blessing breathed upon a fainting earth." The fountain, gushing up from its dark birthplace and flashing in the sun, symbolizes how "from the dark and foul" are brought "the pure and bright." The stormy month of March, with all its drawbacks, is one of hope and encouragement, in whose sternest frown abides "a look of kindly promise yet." He shows imagination as well as fancy when he refers to the winds that "scoop the ocean to its briny springs," and in his simile relative to the flight of days from youth to age, as snow-flakes in the winter's storm "seen rather than distinguished."

We had had versifiers even before Bryant who had attempted to sing of nature and her charms, but none who showed the imaginative sympathy of this poet of

the woods. Carlos Wilcox, who was once seriously spoken of as the Cowper of New England, left some good lines descriptive of summer noon, but dull and mechanical when compared with the life-breathing lines of Bryant on "Midsummer." It was Bryant who set to American poets the example of going close to nature and describing her as she appears here, and not as she had been sung by writers of other lands. A nature-poet need not be a naturalist or astronomer. Mr. Burroughs properly criticises some of Bryant's descriptions as not always true to nature, just as Mr. Alfred Austin saw fit to ridicule Tennyson for his reference to "moonless Mars," because subsequent discoveries proved Mars not to be moonless. Bryant was no ornithologist, any more than Tennyson was an astronomer. But conformity to scientific accuracy is not expected or desirable in imaginative literature.

Regarding Bryant as a type of our nature-poets, perhaps a just criticism would be that he reflects the repose, the grandeur, the awe-inspiring features of nature's handiwork, rather than the life or picturesqueness. Nature was to him an expression of the eternal mind, almost too vast, too august for purely human sympathy. A younger poet who has caught in his blank verse much of the Bryant spirit, as if in revolt at this attitude, defiantly declares, —

"Creation is enough for me.  
I will not look  
On creed or book  
Or aught beside the earth and skies;  
There is no need  
Of book or creed,  
To teach a man and make him good and wise."

Possibly, if Bryant had followed his own advice and shown more evidence in his verse of the warm current



tingling in his veins, he might have more strongly impressed his individuality upon our literature. His self-control often seems to act as a chilling restraint to his "burning words in fluent strains." All through his poems there seems evidence of a strong reserve force held in constant check. His "Winter Piece," appropriately enough, is cold and glittering, and as lifeless apparently as trees covered with frozen sleet, very different in its effect from the picturesque description in Emerson's "Snow Storm." This trait is carried to a painful extreme in his otherwise noble "Hymn to Death," in which he attempts to treat the subject in an unconventional manner. But as if awed by the greatness of his own conception, he proceeds warily and even timidly, and at last, with only partial success, if not completely baffled, leaves the poem little more than a fragment. In strong contrast is the bold, unflinching treatment by Whitman, who takes up the theme again and again, masters it thoroughly, and shows how inspiring after all are the "whispers of heavenly death." Again, take the opening lines of Bryant's sonorous poem "Earth," —

"A midnight black with clouds is in the sky;  
 I seem to feel upon my limbs the weight  
 Of its vast brooding shadow, all in vain  
 Turns the tired eye in search of form; no star  
 Pierces the pitchy veil; no ruddy blaze,  
 From dwellings lighted by the cheerful hearth,  
 Tinges the flowering summits of the grass.  
 No sound of life is heard, no village hum,  
 Nor measured tramp of footstep in the path,  
 Nor rush of wing, while, on the breast of Earth,  
 I lie and listen to her mighty voice;  
 A voice of many tones, sent up from streams  
 That wander through the gloom, from woods unseen,  
 Swayed by the sweeping of the tides of air,

From rocky chasms where darkness dwells all day,  
 And hollows of the great invisible hills,  
 And sands that edge the ocean stretching far  
 Into the night—a melancholy sound ! ”

This is strong, stately, poetic, but how stiff and formal when compared with the joyous abandonment of his brother poet !

“ I am he that walks with the tender and growing night,  
 I call to the earth and sea half held by the night,  
 Night of south winds — night of the large few stars !  
 Still nodding night — mad naked summer night.

“ Smile, O voluptuous cool-breath'd earth !  
 Earth of the slumbering and liquid trees !  
 Earth of departed sunset, — earth of the mountains  
     misty topt !  
 Earth of the vitreous pour of the full moon just tinged  
     with blue !  
 Earth of shine and dark mottling the tide of the river !  
 Earth of the limpid gray of clouds brighter and  
     clearer for my sake !  
 Far-swooping elbow'd earth, — rich blossom'd earth !  
 Smile, for your lover comes ! ”

Perhaps the difference between these two rare poets of nature may be best exemplified by the attitude of each toward the ocean. Bryant, standing on the shore, looks forth —

“ Over the boundless blue, where joyously  
 The bright crests of innumerable waves  
 Glance to the sun at once, as when the hands  
 Of a great multitude are upward flung  
 In acclamation.”

This and other things he sees, draws therefrom a lesson, interprets for us, and goes his way. Whitman, likewise standing on the beach, beholds the waves not as applauding hands, but as “ crooked, inviting fingers.”

He cannot resist the invitation, cushions him soft in ocean's embrace, is rocked in the "billyow drowse," is dashed with the "amorous wet," and becomes "integral" with the sea itself. Whitman was the incarnation of nature, but Bryant its loving interpreter. The three poems just mentioned are characteristic of Bryant's strength and weakness, but such pieces as "The Voice of Autumn," "Waiting by the Gate," "The Land of Dreams," and "The May Sun Sheds an Amber Light," show true imaginative power under the perfect guidance of a master.

Whitman's attitude toward nature was one of close fellowship rather than profound veneration. This has been assigned as a reason for Mr. Addington Symonds finding him "more thoroughly Greek than any other man of modern times." I am not sure but that something similar pervades much of our best nature poetry, which in certain features is often more Hellenic than English. Some of Emerson's poems, — "The Snow Storm" and "The Humble-Bee," for instance, — seem like strains wafted down from that far distant age when man lived close to nature. The proper relation of poetry to nature has been defined by the infelicitous phrase "intuitive immediateness." This lumbering expression, perhaps as well as any, describes the attitude of the Greek pastoral poets not less than that of modern singers, like Whitman, Emerson, and Bryant. The last-named could no more resist nature's influence than he could surrender his gift of song, for to him the sky, the forest, the ocean, and all the manifestations of nature were poetry itself. Nature and poetry are as inseparable as truth and beauty. Bryant took to Greek life and literature as if by intuition. In early life he made a successful translation of a fragment of

Simonides, wrote strongly in favor of the Greek Revolutionists, and gave us some stirring lyrics on Greek subjects. In dignity, repose, and poetic fancies, Bryant's genius was essentially Hellenic. It was this spirit of kinship, rather than erudition, that enabled the American poet to succeed in his Homeric labors where more learned classical scholars have failed. The translations are spirited, idiomatic, and musical. The diction simple, direct, and noble, and therefore Homeric.

The extant fragments of his "Tale of Cloudland" and "Castles in the Air" give a hint of what might have been expected from Bryant in the shape of sustained effort, though he was opposed to long poems. "Sella" and "The Little People of the Snow" are probably his best creations of pure fancy. Possibly the true reason why Bryant never gave us a long poem was to be found in the limitations of the poet rather than in abstract argument against long poems in general. His peculiarly meditative cast of mind would perhaps have precluded the possibility of a successful idyl or epic. We are told that the descriptive parts in his unfinished manuscript poem, "The Spectre Ship," are out of all proportion to the narrative. No one better understood his own limitations than Mr. Bryant himself, and he wisely made no serious effort to do anything that he could not do thoroughly well. Mr. Bigelow is doubtless right also in suggesting that "the ethical, which in the language of a sister art is called the motif of all his verse in which reflection ruled, subordinating if not excluding all the demonstrations of passion, would be fatal to the success of a long poem." There is nothing especially to be regretted in this. We may without a pang surrender from our lit-

erature Emmons' four-volume epic on the last war with England, though we refuse to part with a single line of the eight stanzas "To a Waterfowl."

Like the Greeks of old, Bryant derives his inspiration from the elements themselves. To such a true disciple of nature anything low, mean or sordid is as alien as darkness to the sun. In his early youth he nobly sang of man's mortality; in his age he sang in equally noble strains the immortality of man. Bryant's creative labors may be said to have ended in 1876, when in his eighty-second year he poured forth the torrent of poetic imagery in his sonorous poem "The Flood of Years." This may be fairly considered his swan-song, for in the remaining two years of his life he gave us nothing worthy of his genius. The poem ends with its words of hope and consolation and the vision of universal concord. Such was the final message from our first true poet of nature. While still a dreaming lad, he had depicted his view of death shorn of gloomy terrors, and in his venerated age his convictions of immortality remained unchanged and unshaken. Nor did his influence cease with his life. To all who cherish lofty ideals, his example will continue to beam like a beacon light above the flood of years.

All poets are ministrants at nature's shrine, although it is not given to them all to interpret with equal power. Thoreau, who was a poet-naturalist in prose, could scarce be anything else in verse. Mist, haze, and smoke float through his lines with a volatility suggestive of the subjects. The best poetry of the South is that inspired by nature. The same may be said of the later Western poetry. Henry Timrod, the lyrist of the Confederate cause, could truly sing of "Spring in South Carolina," —

"At times a fragrant breeze comes floating by,  
And brings, you know not why,  
A feeling as when eager crowds await  
Before a palace gate

"Some wondrous pageant; and you scarce would start  
If from a beach's heart,  
A blue-eyed Dryad, stepping forth, would say,  
'Behold me! I am May!'"

To the New England poet, however, —

"May is the pious fraud of the almanac,"

her accredited virtues being properly attributable to the next month.

Like all our distinctively national poets, Lowell is on free terms with nature. He is never more himself than in his day dreams under the trees, indulging in an Indian summer reverie, or listening to the music of the birds and brooks. The dandelion is dearer to him than the "prouder summer blooms." This common flower is his "tropics and his Italy;" even to look at it "unlocks a warmer clime," just as to Emerson the humble-bee is an animated torrid zone. Lowell's attitude toward nature differs from the calm contemplation of Bryant, the subtle divination of Emerson, or the physical joyousness of Whitman, yet possesses something of each. He is not a mere landscape artist, but creates his own scenes and fills them with the creations of rich fancy. He idealizes common objects, and in spite of his constant protests against didacticism, is not above recognizing the uses that underlie the forms of beauty. Longfellow's descriptions are those of an artist, highly imaginative and poetic throughout, though accused of not being always according to facts of science. Whittier understood outdoor life, and his descriptions of New England scenery and climate are faithful to

nature and to poetry. The characteristic work of these three poets, however, was reserved for other fields.

Probably Nathaniel Hawthorne was right in referring to Jones Very of Massachusetts (1813-1880) as a "poet whose voice is scarcely heard among us by reason of its depth." Certain it is that Very never appealed to any but a limited audience. He uttered the promptings of his spirit serenely oblivious of the manner of their reception. Though he sang of beauty, it was the beauty of morality rather than the abstract quality. His descriptions of nature are those of a mystic rather than of an artist.

Very has left us about a hundred short poems relating to nature in her different aspects. Trees, birds, and insects, rocks, clouds, and sunsets appeal to his spiritual understanding, and he is never at a loss to draw from them some lesson or suggestion on the conduct of life. His sympathy with nature is profound, but his methods of expression not varied. This and the frequent repetition of his subject give his writings an impression of monotony fatal to an extended reading. He is seldom trite, though his reflections are often drawn from the commonest objects. Close to ourselves lie the wonders of nature, is the keynote of his poetry. The wind-flower, the columbine, and the snowdrop were to him as eloquent as a forest, a mountain, or an ocean. He was one of the most original as well as most unreadable of our poets. All his poems are infused with the sweetness of his own anemones and columbines, of too subtle an essence to suit the general taste.

Among minor poets who trod in Bryant's footsteps, none gave greater promise than the author of "Frontenac." Alfred B. Street (1811-1881) was pre-emi-

nently the minstrel of New York and her scenery. During the height of his fame he was regarded as the most distinguished native singer that that State had produced. Abroad he received flattering notices from German, French, and Dutch writers. At home Bayard Taylor and H. T. Tuckerman both compared his work to that of the Flemish painters. Bryant naturally found much to praise in the work of his disciple, complimenting him on the fidelity and vividness of his "images drawn from nature." Of the accuracy of Mr. Street's descriptions little need be said. In his verse natural scenery seems photographed rather than idealized, and its impression soon faded from the public mind. The several volumes of his verse find now few readers. In spite of appreciative criticism in two hemispheres, but one short poem, "The Settler," may be said to retain its hold on popular favor. This is to be regretted, for the very music and freedom of outdoor life seem repeated in many of the poems comprised in "Woods and Waters" and "Forest Pictures of the Adirondacks."

If scanty justice had been awarded to the efforts of Very and Street, what is to be said of the fate of that sweetest of all Southern singers of this period, Paul Hamilton Hayne (1830-1886)? He was the embodiment of the poetic spirit of the South, idealizing her landscapes with all the fervor of a semi-tropical imagination. Together with his friends, Simms and Timrod, Hayne, before the war, labored to establish something like a literary atmosphere in the South. The verse of Simms and Timrod was not of the highest order, — that of the former being eclipsed by his prose, — but their influence was in favor of culture. Hayne was read and admired in Europe as well as in his native land. In 1855 he published his first volume of poems,



containing his sonnet on "October," the brilliant imagery of which at once disclosed the young poet's talents as a word-painter. Hayne's neighbors as well as his English admirers have styled him "The Laureate of the South." A truer appellation, perhaps, would be "The Woodland Minstrel of America." He was not the high-priest of nature in the broadest sense. He does not disclose the range of imagination, the loftiness of conception, the profound meditateness of the Northern masters, but he sings his notes as naturally as a bird carolling in the treetops. So genuine is his voice, so true in tone, so musical, that it is questionable if he should be classed among our minor poets. In the silvery melody of his verse he forcibly recalls Poe, of whom he was evidently a sympathetic student. It would be difficult to find in literature a more appropriate picture of Southern scenery than in his "Aspects of the Pines." Within its five stanzas of stately rhythm are exposed to view the Southern pines, "tall, sombre, grim," in their different aspects, in the airs of morning and of noon, until at sunset, when the waves of light are swept by "flute-like breezes," which, "lifting the dark-green tresses of the pine,"

"Till every lock is luminous, gently float,  
Fraught with hale odors, up the heavens afar  
To faint where Twilight on her virginal throat  
Wears for a gem the tremulous vesper star."

These three singers, Very, Street, and Hayne, have been selected as typifying the best among our minor nature-poets during the golden era of American song. Fairly symbolizing respectively the mysticism, the picturesqueness, the beauty of American nature, they were each distinctively American. In a period later than that designed to be covered by this chapter, the

new South and the far West each had poets to idealize their scenes, to be referred to more at length in a later chapter.

Our Northern poets have sung as appreciatively of winter scenes as have our Southern minstrels of their own sunny clime. It is impossible for an American poet to resist the suggestions of nature everywhere appealing to him. This is to be expected of a country where nature's handiwork supplies the inspirations elsewhere to be gathered from a storied past. As a pioneer, Bryant will probably retain his prestige as long as American literature exists. The change typified by him was epochal. By him poetry among us was brought back to its primal uses, and imagination enthroned in her proper place in the realm of song. Great Pan might be dead, but the time had none the less come when music was to be breathed from the woods and waters of America. On account of his priority, Bryant has been in this chapter awarded the place of honor among our poets of nature, though he has been excelled by both Emerson and Whitman in spiritual interpretations. Among all these writers it is the ethical motive that prevails.

It is not enough that the landscape be described in fitting word-pictures. "Perfect descriptions of scenery" are apt to be poor poetry. Unless something more than external beauty is found and reported, the singer would better remain silent. The poet must recognize himself as a spark of the divinity which in a certain sense is nature. He may be misunderstood and accused by grosser intellects of pantheism, but it is a pantheism taught by Christian and Pagan religions alike. Mr. R. H. Stoddard, in his rhapsody on nature, uses the words "My mind the Universe, the Universe

my Mind." By some such language does poetry express its identity with nature. Behind the outward forms the seer discerns the spirit that permeates all, the "conscious law" that is "king of kings." To him the voices of nature have the deep spiritual meaning which to Emerson made the gladness of the woods an inspiration, for —

"There the great Planter plants  
Of fruitful worlds the grain,  
And with a million spells enchants  
The souls that walk in pain.

"Still on the seeds of all he made  
The rose of beauty burns;  
Through times that wear and forms that fade,  
Immortal youth returns."

It is to the credit of our poets after Bryant that they interpreted nature in the true spirit, instead of allowing themselves to be interpreted. It is true there will always exist bardlings who regard nature as a vehicle to convey their own feelings, loves, and disappointments. But such have long since ceased to be of importance in literature.

The frequently repeated charge that American poetry lacks individuality need not concern us much. Our nature-poetry is as national in its meaning and spirit, its breadth and scope, its teaching and aspiration, as that of any other people. Whether it is adapted to the changed methods of thought is another matter. The influence of scientific research is slight, though Very has given us some perfunctory lines on the railway, the telegraph, and the telephone. Whitman in his resounding chants, and Emerson in his oracular quatrains, have in a measure interpreted the triumphs of science. Dr. Holmes, notably in his "Wind-Clouds

and Star-Drifts," has shown how intimately science and poetry may be blended. There is no reason why the inspiring discoveries in astronomy, the startling suggestions of geology, and the achievements of electricity, with its thought-baffling possibilities still in store, should not appeal as powerfully to the imagination of modern poets as the superstitions of the Greeks did to that of the ancients. Mr. John Burroughs, in one of his essays, has shown how in literature, "from a goddess Nature has changed to a rustic nymph, a cloistered nun, a heroine of romance, besides other characters not so definite, till she has at last become a priestess of the soul. What will be the next phase is perhaps already indicated in the poems of Walt Whitman, in which nature is regarded mainly in the light of science through the immense vistas opened up by astronomy and geology." However this may be, it must be admitted that our best nature-poetry hitherto has been of the ideal and spiritual, in which the truths of chemistry and physics have been subordinated to those of art and imagination.

Nature and man are the most suggestive themes for poets of a young republic. Yet imaginative and creative influences were later in our home verse than in our songs of nature. That something more than home themes was required to constitute home poetry, the experience of our earlier versifiers sufficiently proves. Piety and patriotism refused to be converted into poetry on call. The countless high-flown epics dealing with Columbus, the Indians, and the Revolutionary War, perished from lack of internal vitality. A slight improvement was indicated when Paulding undertook to create an idyl on the subject of "The Backwoodsman" (1818); but the attempt was interesting only as

showing how unreadable such metrical treatises may be made. Thirty-seven years later, T. Buchanan Read's "New Pastoral" showed that a similar theme might be invested with a poetic glamour, — rather pale perhaps, but still suggestive of art and imagination. Such performances fell far short of being true idyls of American life. Single episodes in our history had been idealized by Bryant and Longfellow, but it remained for a very different genius to interpret the life in America and arouse the love and veneration of a whole people.

The secret of Whittier's influence may be best explained, perhaps, by one word, — sympathy. "Pure and unspotted from the world" as he was, so strong were his sympathies for humanity that it is not in normal human nature to resist the charm of his simplicity, charity, and courage; his loyalty to truth honor, and conscience; his contempt for sham, tyranny, and hypocrisy. Denied scholastic training, he was recognized by the people as one who had risen from their own ranks, who had passed through their own experiences of life, and was in full sympathy with their own aims and purposes. It was not because he was intensely religious, for moral and didactic poets in this age rarely excite the enthusiasm of their readers. It was not because he was the poet of a section, for the whole nation now approves him as its interpreter. It was not because he was an ardent reformer, for reformers as such seldom ingratiate themselves in the love of their own contemporaries. It was not alone because he sang of freedom, goodness, and love of home. Other American singers had been doing the same thing for a century before his death. In all he wrote there was that broadly sympathetic spirit which went straight to the hearts of his readers.

John Greenleaf Whittier (1807-1892) was a native of Haverhill, Massachusetts, and through the whole of his long life was a resident of that State most of the time. It was not without misgivings that the Quaker youth abandoned his dreams of a purely literary career to champion an unpopular cause. The most craven apologists of slavery came from the North, where the Southern plea of necessity and self-interest did not obtain. With a public conscience so debased, mild expostulations were useless. It was only by persistent effort, week after week, month after month, year after year, that the bugle blasts of Whittier stirred the people from their moral lethargy. These trumpet calls were seconded by the ringing lyrics of Lowell and the bitter sarcasm of the first series of the "Biglow Papers." The cultured Longfellow added the influence of his name in his polished "Poems on Slavery." The spirit of song remained loyal to freedom when nearly every other voice had been stifled by the siren's plea of expediency. But time has wrought its changes. "The hooting mob of yesterday" has in silent awe returned, and monuments are piled above the ashes of those so recently stoned. It was Whittier's fate in a certain way to personify the heroic spirit of his age, and as the poetic exponent of that spirit, he will continue to be regarded long after his impassioned lyrics have ceased to be more than echoes of a bygone strife.

It is in his folk-songs, his ballads and idyls of home, that Whittier rendered his greatest service to literature. These date back to his earliest manhood, when duty and inclination contended for the mastery. Again and again would he put aside the trumpet for the pastoral pipe and prove that the gentle poet of domestic life was not entirely absorbed in the reformer and phi-

lanthropist. His early Indian poems are of value only as tentative efforts. It was in his "Lays of my Home" (1843) that Whittier's genius revealed itself. The poems were few but representative, disclosing his characteristic qualities as writer of reminiscent, descriptive, legendary, tributary, and patriotic verse. Here also was the initial tribute to the stream of his fathers, the first of a series destined to make the Merrimac the classic river of New England. It was the most important contribution yet made among us to a readable ballad literature. American traditions were appropriately sung and American democracy had found a voice in true poetry. Here was the same spirit that animated his whole life and work, a suggestion of that serene optimism which among great discouragements still led him to see the steady gain of man "step by step since time began."

Hatred of tyranny was a passion with him. The puritanism that would persecute witches and Quakers was as repellent to him as modern slavery. Traditions of cruelties practised upon members of his sect had been preserved in his family. These afterwards found expression in such poems as "The Exiles," "Cassandra Southwick," "In the Old South," "The King's Mis-sive," "How the Women went to Dover," and "Banished from Massachusetts." His broadly catholic spirit again manifests itself in the picturesque ballads "Mary Garvin" and "Marguerite," whose heroines were made the victims of the anti-papist bigotry of the times.

Whittier possessed the true secret of modern ballad-writing. He knew how to tell a story gracefully and simply. None of our poets has done so much to invest with a glamour of romance the coasts and hills of New England. Under his magic power the barren soil has

bloomed with a rich, if not luxuriant growth. The regions celebrated in his songs have already become storied ground. Lacking the creative genius of Hawthorne, he has yet done more than any, save the author of "Twice Told Tales," to remove the stale reproach of an unromantic past. It does not in the least concern us that he has not always confined himself to strict and literal accuracy as to facts. The critical Gradgrinds may worry over the confusion as to names and exact dates. Maud Muller, in spite of infelicitous rhymes, will not be displaced from the hearts of myriads of sympathetic admirers, however shadowy may have been her actual existence. Old Floyd Ireson will continue to make the streets of Marblehead notorious, though he was drawn in a dory instead of a cart, and the women took no part beyond furnishing the feathers to embellish his coat of tar. Thomas Macy as a hero and protector of the oppressed exiles, fleeing before the wrath of the Puritans, is a much more attractive figure than the politic citizen, apologizing to the General Court for a simple act of humanity, and afterward leisurely sailing away to Nantucket to be rid of Puritan influences. All the discussion called forth by the publication of "The King's Missive" only goes to show how substantially correct was the poet's rendering of a familiar episode in history. It is much more to the purpose that a legend should be truly interesting than that it should be accurately true. If all the tales of Scottish minstrelsy, all the romances of the Rhine were stripped of their mythical embellishments, much of the world's best poetry would be sacrificed. A very narrow basis of fact suffices in the hands of genius as a foundation for a poetic ballad, and a sufficient basis is shown by official and other records for the Whittier legends.



The failure of Whittier's early poem, "Moll Pitcher" (1832) was of value as a warning to the young writer. It was many years before he drew his inspiration from a similar theme, and then it was in an entirely different method. This was shown by the workmanship of four of his finest ballads: "Mabel Martin," published in 1875 as an amplification of "The Witch's Daughter," written fifteen years before, "The Wreck of Rivermouth," "The Changeling," and "The Witch of Wenham." Each one of these is in some form a reminiscence of the witchcraft delusion in New England near the end of the seventeenth century. Though there is much that is depressing in the history of those days, there are certain aspects that shine out in pleasing relief against the dark background of fanaticism. These the poet has seized upon and retouched, giving us the gentler, the more humane side of humanity condemned to bear its heavy burdens in those trying times, —

"Until from off its breast the land  
The haunting horror threw,  
And hatred born of ghastly dreams,  
To shame and pity grew."

The subjects are handled with good taste and judgment, without the slightest attempt at melodramatic effects. In these, as in his Quaker ballads, the poet indulges in no cheap denunciations of the perpetrators of the wrongs. The sins of the Puritans he regards with pitying sadness, while—as witness the closing stanza in "The King's Missive"—ever ready to do justice to their nobler qualities.

It is impossible to resist the fascination of these lays of our olden times. Their genuine local flavor is not in the least impaired by occasional anachronisms. The scenery of Eastern Massachusetts and New Hampshire

has gained an added charm through the associations suggested by these graphic yet simple tales. On the other hand, where the brighter side of Puritanism is reflected, as in "The Swan Song of Parson Avery," "John Underhill," and "The Prophecy of Samuel Sewall," the poet has depicted that American spirit of the earlier day which survived in the Abraham Davenports of a hundred years later. All these legends, as well as those in lighter vein, like "Skipper Ireson's Ride," "The Double Headed Snake of Newbury," and "Cobbler Keezar's Vision," are inseparably associated with our national traditions. Whittier was no artist, in an esthetic sense, but he has succeeded in idealizing our past and making the rigid Puritan era the romantic age of America.

The verse of Whittier is far superior to his literary prose. The easy, unrestrained quality of the former contrasts strongly with the almost studied, self-conscious air that pervades his sketches and essays. Perhaps this is the reason that his "Barbara Frietchie," "Maud Muller," "Telling the Bees," "The Sisters," and "The Bay of Seven Islands" are so much more successful than his carefully written sketches in prose, which the present generation seems inclined to neglect. He was by nature first and last a poet, even though at one time he nearly sacrificed his birthright on the altar of philanthropy. On the other hand, it is his broadly sympathetic human nature that constitutes him a poet of the present as well as of the past. His ballads of modern life, like those just enumerated, show that the glamour of a legendary past is not indispensable to the spirit of poetry. His tributes to Dr. S. G. Howe and other philanthropists, indicate how deep was his conviction that the age of heroes and martyrs ceased

not with that of chivalry and the crusades. "Life has its true natures yet, true, tender, brave, and sweet," as he expresses it. The record of our common experience, if we will but observe it, is replete with acts of devotion and self-sacrifice. The unsung heroes to whom duty is more than life are to be found among all conditions of men. The poet needed not to go beyond the sea for a Santa Philomena, but could find among the sisters of charity in our own land the "female martyr" whose heroism equalled that of any canonized saint of tradition. In the humble and commonplace ranks of the railway service he can rescue from oblivion the name of Conductor Bradley as a type of countless unknown heroes of daily life, of whose self-sacrificing acts in the performance of duty the world hears and remembers but little.

The poet's statement, "I would not exchange a decade of my own life for a century of the Middle Ages," has perhaps a wider application than originally intended. Whittier entered fully into the spirit of his own times, as any great man to be of force must do. He was quick to detect the poetic side in the march of current events. The passage of an Act of Congress, or a governor's message, would inspire his muse to the composition of "Lines" on apparently the most discouraging themes. Trivial as these transient productions now seem, they represent the deepest feelings of a highly intense period in our history. Far more valuable, however, as permanent contributions, among his occasional verses, are those evincing the tender, restrained emotions of such pieces as "Chicago" and "The Centennial Hymn." It is the deeper, truer, and more thoughtful tone of American life that finds expression in these utterances.

The United States had been a nation for nearly a hundred years before the spirit of its rural life had found proper treatment in verse. It is true our rhymesters, since the days of Livingston's "Philosophic Solitude" (1747), had been giving us metrical platitudes on the beauties of rusticity, but we had no genuine idyl typical of the American home. The best that we could offer were some *genre* pictures by A. B. Street, and such vacuous bleats as "The Old Oaken Bucket." New England farm life in Whittier's boyhood was not an ideal existence. It was one of toil, even of hardship, but by no means of penury. Mingled with much that was hard and crude was the spirit of rugged independence which went so far toward the constitution of American loyalty and patriotism. It had nothing in common with the peasantry of the old world, but was the result of generations of American life, a combination of nature and culture, of close-handed thrift and open-handed hospitality. The genius who could "paint the prospect from his door" could find a sufficiently new and untried field in

"The common unrhymed poetry  
Of simple life and country ways."

It was eminently fitting that the author of our best American ballads should undertake to illustrate the life that rendered possible the conditions underlying so much of the home poetry of his country. It was the subject that lay nearest his heart. The long political agitation in which he had been so prominent a figure had ended. The reform for which he had worked, pleaded, and sung had become an established fact. Peace was shedding her blessings over the land, and he who had sung of arms and heroes now essayed a

gentler tone and gave us the truest eclogue of New England.

The influence of Emerson is apparent in many of Whittier's lines. There was a vein of transcendentalism in the Quaker poet that frequently appears in his meditative verse. Passages in his poem "Questions of Life," for instance, read like echoes of Emerson himself. An extract from the latter's "Snow Storm" is suggestively prefixed to Whittier's masterpiece. Whittier, in his descriptive pieces, nowhere reaches the height attained by Emerson in this exquisite fragment, and it was not necessary that he should. The great charm of "Snow-Bound" (1886) is its investment of common objects with a poetic atmosphere.

To write a poem of nearly eight hundred lines upon such a subject, and sustain the interest to the end, was in itself a triumph of literary art. The pictures are drawn with fidelity and delicacy, the descriptions are true to life, and suffusing it all is the serene atmosphere of faith and hope which seems to exhale from all the poet's best inspirations. The reader instinctively turns again and again to catch a glimpse of this plain, old-fashioned American home of a type already obsolescent in the shifting changes demanded by more modern methods of life and thought. The poet intended it as but a reminiscence, the revivifying of a homely past, and the appreciative response of the general public to the spirit of this idyl is the best tribute to its truthfulness to nature.

As the shadows of age approached, the poet indulged more and more in his reminiscent vein, his thoughts reverting to the earliest beginnings of that struggle whose termination he had lived to witness. Before his fancy rose the scenes where under bluer

and more kindly skies than those that bend above New England's hills the earliest "Friends" had found a safe asylum. Here was a society of people still bound to the old world by tenderest ties, yet living amid most primitive surroundings. On the banks of the Delaware, where Penn had planted his sylvan empire and the laws of peace and friendship ruled, life, as regarded through the perspective of two centuries, seems the nearest realization of true pastoral simplicity to be found in our history. This inviting field had been strangely ignored by our poets, though perhaps none was so capable of doing it justice as Mr. Whittier. To this idyllic community, as related in a previous chapter, Francis Daniel Pastorius, the newly converted Quaker, German poet, scholar, and mystic, had come to make his abode. His Germantown home became a shrine for those needing aid and counsel. He was the guide and friend of all, Indians as well as white. Here he held his mimic court, dispensing charity to the needy, protection to the weak and justice to the oppressed. Tenderly and lovingly the bard recalls the life and aims of one who may be considered his prototype of two hundred years ago. As an historical sketch, the poem, lit up with touches of fancy and even humor, possesses a value apart from its literary qualities.

Seven years after the publication of Longfellow's first book of verse, the first edition of Whittier's "Voices of Freedom" appeared at Philadelphia. These two volumes of "Voices" naturally challenge comparison. The one, replete with melodious rhythm, repeated the lessons learned from the wisdom and culture of the past, and was appropriately enough entitled "Voices of the Night." The other, instinct with the fire of Americanism, gave utterance to the deepest

feelings of the human heart. To the public feeling of the time, "Voices of the Night" were more acceptable than "Voices of Freedom." We were slow to appreciate the latter, perhaps because they were too American — they related to matters too close at home for us so long accustomed to imitative literature. The poet's intense Americanism, moreover, shocked refined sensibilities long inured to transatlantic standards. We were not sure but that Americanism implied a certain degree of plebeianism, or was at best suggestive of Dwight and Barlow. Longfellow profited by this feeling, for it was not until his genius had commanded recognition from his method of handling conventional themes that he ventured upon home subjects in a manner worthy of his talents. With the growth of the nation, independence of judgment asserted itself. We began to realize what Americanism in literature really was, — that it meant something more than the transplanting of English thought on American soil. The intellect of the country typified by Emerson was in revolt against conventionalism. Whittier was the native expression of an aroused conscience in literature. He was the moral, as Emerson was the intellectual, champion of Americanism.

In his home ballads and idyls Whittier has caught the true spirit, not of the fleeting hour, but of human nature itself. He has infused our common country life with the glow and glamour of a poetic atmosphere. We acknowledge his transparent faults, his bad rhymes, false quantities, and uncertain grammar. We must accept without wincing his favorite pronunciation of *been*. His formal imperfections are part of his individuality, for which at this late day an apology would be superfluous. He was not an American Béranger or

a Yankee Burns, but simply Whittier, a term that now stands for the embodiment of loyalty in its most comprehensive sense; and not of loyalty alone, but of courage to maintain convictions in the face of fearful odds, to strike at the shackles of conventionalism as well as slavery, and to infuse in the breasts of his countrymen a patriotism that is purer and manlier for his having sung.

There was an episode in our literary history worthy of comment while discussing the poetry descriptive of American life. The aspirations toward high ideals among the intellectual classes in New England that found expression in the pages of "The Dial" and materialized in the Brook Farm experiment, extended to those in humble walks of life. The female operatives in the mills of Lowell city were remarkable for a high order of intelligence. They established what is generally regarded as the first, if not the only, instance of a purely literary magazine controlled by a purely industrial community. The "Lowell Offering" was founded in 1841 and lasted for several years. Its contributors were confined exclusively to the female mill operatives. The reader will at once recall Mr. Dickens's admiration of the intelligence of these working-girls, who, after twelve hours of tedious labor in the mills every day, could still find time and inclination for music and literature, and whose literary exponent he compares advantageously with a great many English annuals. A volume of extracts from the "Offering" was published by its editor, Miss Farley, in 1847, and in 1849 Charles Knight published in London another selection from its pages, entitled "Mind among the Spindles."

Among the brightest contributors to this periodical



was Miss Lucy Larcom (1826-1893), a native of Beverly, Massachusetts, and daughter of a sea captain, whose death left her dependent on her own resources while still a young girl. Miss Larcom represented the feminine side, as Whittier the masculine side, of Americanism in literature. The ability displayed in her writings in the "Offering" attracted the attention of Mr. Whittier, who from that time became her friend and adviser. The influence of the gentle master is apparent throughout her poetry. The regions celebrated by Whittier reappear in Miss Larcom's verse in passages worthy of the elder singer. None of our female poets has sung so well of home themes. If Beverly Shore has not become so classic as Sudbury town or Hampton Beach, it is not the fault of an appreciative minstrel. The "romantic fancies" which she weaves into her verse are for the most part tales of the sea, tenderly and pathetically rendered, with glimpses of the poet's child life by the ocean. They are enlivened by light touches of humor in the reminiscent sketches, as in the lines on the psalm-singing proclivities of the primitive New Englanders. In her enthusiasm for the days that are gone, the poet seems to forget that the very conditions whose desuetude she so charmingly regrets were effected only in the teeth of strenuous opposition from orthodox Puritans, and after bitter heart burnings and rebellions. Modern church music, with all its accessories, is no greater innovation, when compared with that of two or three generations ago than was the introduction of the bass viol and flute as compared with renditions of "Sternhold and Hopkins" and the "Bay Psalm Book." This consideration, however, need not deter us from admiring the poetry of the lyric, "The Old Hymns," which follows the reflections on psalm-

singing. No unprejudiced reader will begrudge the tribute to the Puritans so poetically rendered in the opening lines of this lyric.

When in 1857 the poem "Bitter-Sweet" was published by Dr. Josiah G. Holland (1819-1881), it appeared as if a notable addition had been made to the literature of American life. The poem was suggestive of Whittier, Longfellow, and Emerson combined, without being an echo of either one. In the opening passages there were strong scenes of New England life, such as the old-fashioned homestead, with its family reunion at Thanksgiving. The people were natural flesh and blood creatures, of a more cultured class, perhaps, than those described in "Snow-Bound." The verse is pure and lucid, and the underlying doctrine that evil is an essential part of the divine plan, clearly and even ostentatiously set forth. The hero, it is true, is a prig, whose sky-soaring instincts would not descend to explanation which would have relieved his devoted wife of much of her suffering. Certain parts also might have been omitted without in the least affecting the unity of the work. But prolixity had so long been the bane of our minor singers that it might well be condoned in this instance where there was so much of merit.

The promise indicated in "Bitter-Sweet" was not fulfilled in the author's later works. "Kathrina," even more than its predecessor, is overweighted with didacticism. To that large class whose tastes are gratified with a liberal mixture of Tupperism, it proved a revelation, as shown by the immense sale. The impression after reading it is one of mild wonder that the author should venture to consume several thousand lines of blank verse to prove that religion is essential to hap-

piness. All through "Bitter-Sweet" and "Kathrina" the intent is disagreeably obtrusive to write a moral poem. The diction is frequently disfigured with mannerisms, petty affectations, and strained conceits. As long as the author confines himself to simple country life in the Connecticut valley his descriptions are graphic and poetic, but when he attempts to portray metropolitan life, he becomes hopelessly submerged in the bathetic. In "The Mistress of the Manse" there are fewer offences against good taste, and less a tendency to sermonizing. It is decidedly among the best narrative poems of the Civil War. A tender, grave, and patriotic spirit characterizes the work throughout. It failed of the popular success attained by the earlier poems, perhaps because there was not enough of preaching to satisfy the poet's former admirers, and not enough of poetry to please those of a more critical judgment.

Dr. Holland was, above all, a moralist. As shown in his amiably didactic essays, he believed in the application of a true and healthy moral tone to practical affairs of life. His novels are pure, strong delineations of American character, exhibiting the same qualities that gained popular success for his verse. Considered as a poet in the broadest sense, he probably would not rise above the third class of American singers. In his chosen field as chronicler of the simple annals of rural homes, he easily takes his place among our poets of the second if not the first rank. His influence was always in favor of what he conceived to be the best. Though pre-eminently the poet of the commonplace, it was a commonplace that was idealized and beautified by much that is poetic in every-day American life.

For a domestic nation, our poetry of home life had

a remarkably belated beginning, and strangely enough it arose west of the Ohio almost as early as in New England. In New York, aside from the efforts of Street and the "Knickerbocker writers" already alluded to, no local poetry issued worthy of notice. Better indications came from what was then "the West." William Davis Gallagher (1808-1894), one of the earliest singers from the Mississippi valley, began publishing his books of verse when twenty-seven years old, and several years after he had passed his three score and ten was still publishing, regardless of public indifference. His little poems, "The Laborer," "Conservatism," and "Truth and Freedom," have the true American ring, but much better are his songs of the pioneer days in the West. In his old age he gave us "Miami Woods and other Poems." While he never wrote a great poem, he did good work in giving voice to the poetic side of pioneer life in a region which later was to give us a Piatt, a Venable, and a Riley.

Another singer in whom the middle West was to find a sympathetic interpreter was Benjamin F. Taylor (1819-1887), poet, lecturer, and war correspondent. The reference by a writer in the London "Times" to Taylor as the American Goldsmith was anything but beneficial to the Chicago poet. He early sang of the beauties of country life, such as "The Old Barn," husking, milking time, country sleighing, and other topics that have so long formed the stock in trade of the rustic bard. Later he struck a more original vein and wrote some excellent lines on Old Fort Dearborn and Chicago, Wisconsin, the Tennessee, the prairies, and other features of the middle West. His best poems, because they are his own, are those relating to American enterprise. If the locomotive is the mate-

rial symbol of American enterprise, no poet of recent American life can afford to ignore its suggestions. Whittier, Whitman, and Bret Harte have caught some of the picturesque attributes of the American railway-service, but none has so sympathetically sung of its material triumphs as has the author of "The Overland Train." It is not claimed that in this poem Taylor has made the most of his subject, but it is only just to concede to him, in this and in "The Flying Heralds" and "Fire and Water," the credit of illustrating how far such subjects adapt themselves to the exigencies of verse.

The best home literature of the West is of too recent a date for treatment in this chapter.

The literary development of the "Old South" was necessarily retarded. The social life of that section was antagonistic to a taste for higher native literature. Feudalism and slavery were deleterious in their effects upon the master as well as the slave. It is true, as early as 1777 James McClurg, with the assistance of Judge St. George Tucker, wrote some society verses entitled, "The Belles of Williamsburgh," but so far as internal evidence goes, the "Belles" referred to might have been the denizens of any English town as well as of the provincial capital of Virginia. In fact, there was little in the home life of the South for two generations after the Revolution to encourage devotion to the finer graces. It was indeed a physically robust and wholesome out-of-door life that its gentry led, of which hunting and horse-racing formed a very considerable portion. The earliest approximation to home poetry was from William Crafts (1787-1826) of Charleston, who celebrated the sporting tendencies of his city in his effort called "The Raciad." Crafts was the

author also of a poem on "Sullivan's Island," and of some satirical sketches. Later appeared William J. Grayson (1788-1863), the author of several volumes, all now forgotten, save his idyllic poem "The Hireling and the Slave" (1856), designed to show the superior condition of the unpaid negro slave to that of the hireling who works for pay. Though William Gilmore Simms (1806-1870) published several volumes of verse, including some prosy dramas, they are, with the exception of a few descriptive passages, as completely ignored by the general reader as are the works of Crafts and Grayson.

Though little poetry of value was produced at the South before the war, many of the best and most original American songs had reference to Southern life. However humiliating the confession, negro minstrelsy was the earliest approach to an indigenous American drama. There were even some hopeful enough to descry in the song and dance of these performances the origin of a national comedy, as the Plautian dramas are traceable to the rude medley of the Etrurian songs and dances of an earlier age. In 1830 George W. Dixon first appeared as a negro minstrel at Albany. A little later, Thomas D. Rice was successful in a similar rôle at Pittsburgh. Under Rice's management the buffoonery of Dixon was exalted to something like art. In 1842 Edwin P. Christy, at Buffalo, began a career that was soon to realize a fortune for him. It was in that year that Stephen C. Foster (1825-1864) composed his "Uncle Ned" and "O Susannah," to the great profit of the minstrel troupes. Foster was born in Pennsylvania, and spent most of his life at the North. He was a cultivated artist and musician, writing his songs to suit the airs that he had already composed,

and is still remembered as the author of "Old Folks at Home," "Massa's in the Cold, Cold Ground," "Old Black Joe," "My Old Kentucky Home," and many others similar. The plantation songs of Foster showed a marked advance over the "Coal Black Rose" and "Zip Coon" of Dixon and the "Jim Crow" and "Lucy Long" of Rice. They possess sentiment without mawkishness and humor without coarseness; and even now, when the conditions they symbolize have long since passed away, bid fair to outlast in popular favor their author's more sentimental efforts, like "Come where my Love lies dreaming."

Aside from a few lyrics of Whittier, O'Hara, and Hoffman, the Mexican war inspired but one masterpiece. The first series of the "Biglow Papers" (1846-1848) is one of the few modern satiric poems destined to live. During the Civil War, however, the highly wrought feelings on both sides naturally found vent in strongly emotional verse. A comparison of the Revolutionary poetry with that of our Civil War is sufficient to indicate how far the literary development of the country had kept pace with its material growth. A respectable list might be made of those whose poetic reputation rests on the patriotic verse of this period. When we reflect that all our verse writers then living, great and small, gave expression to their sentiments, some estimate may be formed of the quantity and quality of our poetic literature during those memorable years.

It is impossible to exaggerate the benefits of a pure home literature that idealizes and spiritualizes the commonplaces of our every-day lives. Americans are better citizens to-day for having "Snow-Bound." The national conscience is purer for the existence of

"Voices of Freedom," the "Biglow Papers," and "The Old Folks at Home." While we glory in the statement that ours is a country of the future, loyalty to native land is in no way weakened by the accumulations of a storied past. The ballads and idyls of Whittier and Longfellow, the sketches and tales of Irving and Hawthorne, have invested portions of our country with a legendary lore already inseparable from their surroundings. A land is no less dear to its inhabitants for being interesting.

As might be expected in the home literature of a democracy, the humanitarian element is conspicuous. It is the broadly sympathetic humanity of Whittier, as we have already noted, that makes him the poet of the people. Minor singers who have trod beside him or in his footsteps manifest the same trait in a less degree. Our best home ballads have not so much to do with the heroism of the battlefield as with the more unobtrusive virtues of patience, self-sacrifice, and moral courage. Love of Nature is another characteristic of these idyls and ballads of American life. Some of the most imaginative passages are descriptive of the influence of the forest, the mountains, and the sea.

Another pleasing feature of this verse is its purity. There is not a narrative poem, long or short, by any of our best singers that is not inspired by a worthy purpose, by some high ideal in life. It is true, our poets are not always fortunate in their manner of dealing with the subject. The tendency to moralize has resulted in a didacticism disagreeably apparent. The artistic effect, of course, is weakened. A reader naturally resents being treated to a sermon when he seeks a song. This fault has been the bane of American verse from the days of the Puritans. But perhaps the



most distinguishing characteristic of this class of poetry is its depth of sentiment. In some respects Americans are the most sentimental people on earth. In our most popular war songs, as a foreigner once observed, the mother is the favorite subject. Whittier himself unconsciously illustrated this feeling when he made the mother a more prominent figure than the father in that typical household. Perhaps the most palpable illustration of American sentimentalism is the popularity of Memorial Day throughout the country. That a whole nation so constantly accused of undue commercialism should habitually turn aside from its regular pursuits to honor the memory of those long dead, shows how profound are the tenderer feelings below all the practical, matter-of-fact exteriors. This sentimentalism, as a national trait, is a patent fact which seems to be ignored by those writers on both sides of the Atlantic who insist that the "Americanism" of any of our literary products is to be judged in proportion to its rowdiness.

We were a long time in ridding ourselves of the impression that no poetry could be distinctively American — could "smack the soil," as the phrase went — without a due admixture of war paint and feathers. All such notions, happily, have long since been abandoned. The impossible Indian of romance has been relegated to his proper sphere. There are plenty of elements of poetry in our plain American lives, in our accomplishments in the past and aspirations for the future. American life as reflected in its verse offers one of the most potent triumphs of modern democracy. It is the life of a plain, but straightforward, high-minded commonalty, indifferent to social distinctions, filled with love of home and country, but sufficiently self-assertive

to preserve its independence, even at the risk of incurring the charge of provincialism. True Americanism is the higher development of Anglo-Saxonism in its new environment. Any other statement is contrary to nature and truth.

## CHAPTER XI

### *IDYLLIC AND LYRIC POETS*

1839-1870

IN the career of Henry W. Longfellow (1807-1882) may be witnessed the first notable influence upon literature by our native writers. Longfellow's early poems and prose show decidedly the examples of Bryant and Irving, as he himself candidly admitted. His first volume of original verse, "Voices of the Night," was published at Cambridge in 1839. Externally, the book was deemed a triumph of artistic skill of the time; internally, it was unprecedented in our literature for its lyrical beauty. But it also marked the growth of the poet. It is in no sense of disparagement that Longfellow is referred to as a poet of culture. Like many a rare product, his genius required careful cultivation before it could blossom into anything like perfection. There is a wide range between the "Earlier Poems," even those deemed worth preserving, and maturer work, like "The Light of Stars" and "Footsteps of Angels." German literature wrought its first influence upon American verse in "Flowers" and "The Beleaguered City."

Whatever its faults, this little volume contained the elements of those later poems that have charmed countless readers throughout the world. Its almost perfect versification, its spirit of tenderness and hope, of resignation and fortitude, its unobtrusive but natural didac-

ticism, foreshadowed its author's present rank in the world of letters. Henceforth he was certain of his audience, whatever he might offer. His chief danger was that his graceful facility of versification would lead him to take advantage of the hospitable welcome which the reading public was ever ready to extend. That this hospitality was never abused is not the least among his merits.

The "Americanism" manifested in the "Voices" was of the most shadowy character. Didacticism, which had been a characteristic of American verse from the days of the Puritans, was indeed present, but so subordinate to the sense of beauty as not to seem out of place. The most conspicuous national trait was the spirit of hopefulness, the incentive to action. The local coloring of some of the earlier poems was too pallid and imitative to deserve notice. When "Ballads and Other Poems" appeared in 1841, the national flavor of "The Skeleton in Armor" and "Wreck of the Hesperus" was like a tonic. Here were American themes treated in an unhackneyed manner; while in "The Village Blacksmith" and "Excelsior" the spirit of "Americanism" was obvious. The new volume showed that the young singer was already prepared to expand his wings for higher and steadier flights.

Longfellow had the artist's disdain of literal scientific truth or historical accuracy. The old tower at Newport enabled him freely to exercise his fancy, though with a perfectly justifiable poetic license. He could unblushingly write of the "Occultation of Orion," and even seek to justify the expression. The plain Moravian church of an obscure Pennsylvania settlement was adorned with all the esthetic equipments of a Roman Catholic chapel. "Glimmering tapers shed

faint light on the cowed head." The burning censer swung before the altar, and in the "dim mysterious aisle" is heard "the nuns' sweet hymn." Worst of all, Count Pulaski is accused of wearing as a "martial cloak and shroud" a piece of silk twenty inches square, made to be borne on the end of a lance. All these lyrics, however, even the "Psalm of Life" and "Excelsior," appealed to a world-wide constituency that was sympathetic and not critical, and we gratefully accept the gentle lesson of patience, fortitude, and aspiration, knowing full well how in his life the singer exemplified his own exhortation, —

"Oh, fear not in a world like this,  
And thou shalt know ere long,  
Know how sublime a thing it is  
To suffer and be strong."

Within five years the poet had published four volumes of his verse. In 1845 he edited a little collection of poems, called "The Waif," and in the same year rendered his important contribution to general literature, "The Poets and Poetry of Europe." In the following year appeared his fifth volume of original work, "The Belfry of Bruges and Other Poems," showing unmistakable growth of the poet's powers. Longfellow had a proper contempt for artificial nationalism. He could sing as sympathetically of Bruges or of Nuremberg, of Cadenabbia or Amalfi, as of the river Charles or his native town by the sea. The spirit of Americanism was evident in this last volume, in the tributes to the dignity of labor, the distaste for war, hatred of oppression and confidence in the future that appeared respectively in "Nuremberg," "The Arsenal at Springfield," "The Norman Baron," and "To a Child," — to say nothing of the local coloring in "The Old Clock on the Stairs,"

and the moderately successful hexameters in "To the Driving Cloud." The volume was also noteworthy as containing one of his most brilliant poetic conceptions, "The Occultation of Orion," which, in spite of its unfortunate title, deserves a place among the rarest works of imaginative poetry in all literature.

The deportation of the Acadians was an event of a sufficiently distant past (and of a still remoter civilization) to justify poetic treatment. It was one of those historic incidents that, regardless of original merits, readily enlist human sympathies on the weaker side. Much of the suffering caused by the separation of families and their frequent reduction to a condition little better than slavery was the result doubtless of accident rather than of design. But whether or not Mr. Bancroft and other historians are warranted in referring to the sorrows of the Acadians as wantonly inflicted, it is certain that the punishment was out of all proportion to the offences charged. From that fateful morning of September Fifth, 1755, when all the men of Grand Pré were inveigled into their little parish church by the British authorities, and after four days' imprisonment released only to be dispersed throughout the world, down to revolutionary times, these harmless and gentle people were made to feel that there is no hatred so bitter as that of race-prejudice, no cruelty so blind as that of religious bigotry. The persecutions inflicted by the English-Americans in Pennsylvania and New England upon these unhappy exiles are matters of historic record. The poet therefore could not have selected a theme in its suggestions more humiliating to our national vanity. It is worthy of remark that in our most celebrated American idyl, composed by a descendant of the pope-hating Pilgrims, the most attractive characters are

Roman Catholics, while the Protestant New Englanders, though only a brief glimpse is given of them in the early part of the poem, are presented in anything but an enviable light. Moreover, while the South, the West, and the Middle States contribute to form the backgrounds for the scenery, the territory of New England is ignored. Certainly nothing can be conceived more repugnant to the canons of "Americanism" as early exemplified in the works of the post-revolutionary bards of Connecticut. Besides Mr. Longfellow's poem, the incident of the Acadian exile inspired one of Mr. Whittier's most pathetic ballads, as well as an exquisite prose sketch by Nathaniel Hawthorne.

It was on the 24th of October, 1839, that Hawthorne entered in his note book the suggestion of Mr. Connolly concerning the Acadian lovers who had been separated on their intended wedding-day, to be, after many wanderings, re-united only at the death-bed of one of them. At the time that Hawthorne made the entry, he was engaged upon his juvenile historical essays for "Grandfather's Chair." The sketch of the Acadian exiles in the second part of the work, originally concluded with the sentence, "Methinks, if I were an American poet, I would choose Acadia for the subject of my song." This was eight years before the appearance of "Evangeline." Hawthorne neglected to write a romance on the subject, waiving his right in favor of the poet. In view of Hawthorne's own statements on the subject, and his admiration of the poem, it is strange to read in a distinguished writer's life of Longfellow, that Hawthorne saw nothing in the legend; that, true to the strange taste of Hawthorne's "miasmatic conscience," he "felt the want of a sin to study in the story, so would have none of it;" that "with Acadia Hawthorne

would have nothing to do on any terms."<sup>1</sup> Hawthorne's own letters, note-books, and writings show how powerfully the tradition did appeal to his fancy. Mr. Lathrop's explanation seems the most rational, namely, that Hawthorne felt profoundly grateful to the poet for the latter's kindly notice of the "Twice Told Tales" in the "North American Review;" that Hawthorne, "on seeing how much the Evangeline anecdote struck his friend the poet, resolved to yield it up at once, without betraying any intention he may have had of utilizing it himself."<sup>2</sup> Hawthorne certainly had no reason to repent of his generosity, and no one rejoiced more heartily in Mr. Longfellow's success.

Longfellow, more than any other American poet, studied the technique of his art. His comprehension of the laws of versification was so thorough that his selections of appropriate meters came to him as by instinct. The almost uniform failure of writers of English verse in dactylic hexameter might well have deterred him from any prolonged effort. His own attempts in that meter up to that time, it must be confessed, were not especially successful. His resolution to adopt this form was made only after careful deliberation. As might have been expected, such an innovation (for innovation it certainly was) called forth a storm of criticism. Superficial critics, primed with laws of classical prosody, readily found flaws to pick. The novelty of its application startled the conservatives, who could not or would not discriminate between the essential principles which distinguish English from

<sup>1</sup> Prof. E. S. Robertson's "Life of Longfellow," "Great Writers" Series, London, 1887.

<sup>2</sup> Introductory Note to "Grandfather's Chair" Vol. IV. Riverside ed. Hawthorne's Works.



ancient classical prosody. It is true the feet in Longfellow's verse were not the spondees and dactyls of Homer and Virgil, for the simple reason that English accentuation bears little resemblance to classical quantity. Yet these differed from their classical prototypes no more in degree than do the iambics of Milton, Spenser, and Pope from the iambics of the Greek and Latin dramatists. The German poets had proved its adaptability to their language. Take for instance the opening lines of Goethe's "Hermann und Dorothea: "

"Hab ich den Markt und die Strassen doch nie so einsam gesehen,  
Ist doch die Stadt wie gekehrt! wie ausgestorben! Nicht funfzig  
Daucht mir blieben zurück von allen unsern Bewohnern."

Here the laws of classical versification are as openly defied as in the work of the American poet, nor can it be claimed that these lines are more melodious to the ear than the opening lines of "Evangeline," —

"This is the forest primeval. The murmuring pines and the  
hemlocks,  
Bearded with moss, and in garments green, indistinct in the  
twilight,  
Stand like Druids of eld, with voices sad and prophetic."

Longfellow, in his artistic treatment of the meter, proved his good judgment in its selection as thoroughly as Bryant showed his good judgment in its rejection in favor of one that he was most capable of handling. The instant popularity of "Evangeline" demonstrated that the form commended itself to the masses as well as to the cultured few, and that previous failures were due to unskilfulness in use rather than to any inherent obstacles in the form itself. In the hands of an unskilful versifier nothing can be more wretched. When controlled by a master, nothing can be more melodious.

It is the rhythm of passion, emotion, and delicate fancy, and therefore, in this instance, best adapted to the poet's conception of his theme. There are, it is true, occasional lines that jar on the reader, and fail to "scan themselves" on first perusal, just as there are discordant and irregular lines in almost any standard work in English pentameter. Owing to the structure of the English language, trochaics are interchangeable with spondees; a substitution, under the laws of English scansion perfectly legitimate, just as two unaccented syllables are frequently made to pass for an iambic foot in our heroic verse. The long roll of the hexameter line, its susceptibility to constant variety in the first four feet and uniformity in the last two, and its changing cæsural, give it a rhythm peculiarly adapted to the sentiment of the poem. The passage in the second part relating to the mocking-bird's song, which its author by way of experiment recast into rhymed iambics, is a sufficient argument in favor of the hexameter.

In view of the estimation in which American verse had generally been held in the mother-country, it was no slight tribute to Longfellow's poem that its success should have suggested the form of Clough's "Bothie" and Kingsley's "Andromeda." While the revived English hexameter commended itself to Kingsley, Clough, Whewell, and Freiligrath abroad, and to Felton, Holmes, and others in America, Poe could see nothing in it at all commendable. His savage onslaughts elicited no reply from Longfellow further than the entry in his diary, —

" In Hexameter sings serenely a Harvard Professor;  
In Pentameter him damns censorious Poe."

That the poem itself appealed to universal human nature was evidenced by the numerous translations in

German, French, Dutch, Swedish, Danish, Italian, Portuguese, Spanish, and Polish, to say nothing of the countless unauthorized English reprints.

The poem is thoroughly American in something far deeper than a merely geographical sense. Its broad humanity, its spirit of toleration, and its pictures of democratic simplicity are suggestive of an ideal republicanism, though nothing could have been more alien to the author's purpose than to idealize the genius of democracy. It was an elaboration of the messages whispered to the singer in his younger days by the "Voices of the Night." The poet nowhere indulges in cheap denunciation of the wrongs of which he sings. He has given us simply the esthetic side, but in colors so true that while apparently appealing to the sense of the beautiful, they stir the emotions far more deeply than would the most violent invective. The perfection of his art is shown in the impression left upon the reader in spite of the restrained and tender tone of the narrative itself. It is no wonder that the gentle Whittier at his first perusal of the poem should have been moved to the bitter comment, "The true history of the Puritans of New England has yet to be written."

"Evangeline" was published October 30, 1847, one of the decisive dates in the history of American literature. It was the first narrative poem of considerable length by an American showing genuine creative power. Its purity of diction and elevated style, its beauties of description, its tenderness, pathos, and simplicity, its similes and metaphors at once true, poetic, and apt, its frequent passages betokening imaginative power, all embodied in a form unconventional yet peculiarly appropriate, stamped it as a new and individual creation. It was the highest inspiration in idyllic poetry

produced in America. The impression left by a perusal of the poem is like that attributed to the passing of its heroine. It "seemed like the ceasing of exquisite music." American literature had proved its right to recognition, and in at least this one instance the world at large has not been slow to bear tribute of admiration.

As Goethe's idyl suggested the metrical form of "Evangeline," so Schiller's "Lay of the Bell" suggested the form of "The Building of the Ship." Longfellow's work, while not exhibiting the strength and force of its prototype, has the advantage of a permanent interest not attaching to the local and temporary incidents of the German work. Combining the features of the lyric, the ballad, and the idyl, it became at once a popular favorite and made its author the poet of the hustings as well as the drawing-room. Its patriotic tone stirred the hearts of the people where the more polished poems on slavery had failed.

The charge of being an exotic, though perhaps true when preferred by Margaret Fuller against Longfellow, was sufficiently refuted in his later career. His European travels and European culture only intensified his loyalty to native land. There is no narrative poem of Puritanism comparable to "The Courtship of Miles Standish." It matters little how far the incidents of the poem depart from strict historic truth. The pretty wedding scene, with the rigors of Puritanism toned down by the refining art of the poet, commends itself as the most attractive idyllic sketch of early Puritanism in verse. "Elizabeth," as a poem, is so far below either of what may be called its companion pieces as to deserve mention by way of contrast only. *Evangeline* attracts by the pathos of her fate, *Priscilla* by her woman's strength and weakness. Each has been

enshrined among the ideals of song in the hearts of the people, and each seems destined so to remain in spite of recent veritists and realists.

For more than a century, as we have seen, American verse writers had been vainly endeavoring to throw the glamour of romance about the American Indian. The short poems of Freneau, and later of Bryant and Lowell, were the only approximations to success. Whittier himself has acknowledged the failure of his early attempts in that direction. Longfellow's methods were at once original and appropriate. He took the Indian of nature, but gave us simply the aboriginal myths and legends, idealized in a refined poetic imagination. In adopting the trochaic metre of the Finnish runes of "Kalevala," the poet gave another proof of his excellent discrimination in the matter of metrical form. No setting more suitable could have been chosen for these simple legends wafted down from the childhood of a race. It was no fault of Longfellow that some of these primitive myths of our aborigines bore a striking resemblance to those of an almost equally barbarous people of the Old World. The poet took them as he found them recorded by writers who had probably never heard of "Kalevala." He used a legitimate poetic license in his treatment of the theme, attributing to his hero certain legendary episodes, with which Hiawatha was not actually identified in the original traditions, but which with perfect propriety might be accredited to him. Oral traditions among an ignorant race must necessarily be altogether vague, indefinite, and even conflicting. That the Algonquin Manabozho should be confounded with the Hiawatha of the Iroquois is not at all remarkable. If the identity of the two was confused in the minds of the Indians them-

selves, no criticism can attach to the poet for perpetuating that confusion. Yet it seems a little strange that Longfellow should so far ignore the achievement which in the minds of the Iroquois was the crowning glory of their hero's career. As the alleged founder of the Iroquois league of six nations, the effect of Hiawatha's influence reaches down to historic times. This is only remotely suggested in the injunctions of Gitche Manito, the mighty, as narrated in the first canto.

Censorious critics found abundant opportunity to exercise their wits in parodying and paraphrasing this "Indian Edda." Its meter was even more unusual in English literature than that of "Evangeline." Longfellow had been familiar with the Finnish epic long before he adopted its form. The inherent common features of the two poems are such as characterize many primitive literatures. Parallelism and alliteration are natural to an early stage of literary development. To accuse Longfellow, therefore, of imitation, on account of form or even methods of expression, is the most puerile kind of criticism, which may with equal justice be applied to the greatest ancient and modern poets.

If in the metrical form of "Evangeline" the poet had ignored conventionalism, in that of Hiawatha he actually defied it. Routine critics, who never can and never will endure anything not sanctioned by age and usage, stood aghast at the poet's temerity. Here was an American writer who had actually offered something without precedent in English literature. The very novelty of the poem subjected it to criticism, ridicule, and even abuse. A Boston critic sagely declared, "It contains nothing so precious as the golden time which would be lost in the reading of it." But people persisted in reading it. Within less than four

weeks from its publication ten thousand copies had been sold in this country alone. There were four translations in German, besides those in French, Dutch, Swedish, Danish, Italian, and Polish, and an attempted rendition in Latin. Parodies and criticisms have long since been forgotten, but the poem itself, as the nearest approach to an American epic, continues to be a favorite with learned and unlearned alike.

Many of these Indian traditions, like the legends of the winds, the origin of maize, the pictured rocks, the wooing and the wedding, the famine and desolation, and the meeting of impersonated spring and winter, which seemed frivolous originally, became invested with a deep significance. Historical accuracy, indeed, was neither desired nor required. The proprieties of time and place are not likely to be punctiliously observed in such performances. But the poet strains his privileges to the utmost when he brings his mythical hero down into historic times. Freiligrath, in the preface to his translation, comments on the incongruity of Hiawatha, son of the west wind, meeting Christian missionaries in the seventeenth century,<sup>1</sup> and Longfellow himself deprecated the closeness of the contact between saga and history in that respect.

Though one of our most versatile writers and gifted with a keen sense of humor, Longfellow was no humorist. The wit of Chispa in "The Spanish Student" is flat and bookish. The poet's playful fancies, his nearest approach to humor, find their best expression in portions of "Hiawatha" and such of his tales as "The Cobbler of Hagenau," "The Bell of Atri," and "The Monk of Casal Maggiore." In most of these the

<sup>1</sup> Der Sang von Hiawatha, Uebersetz von F. Freiligrath. Stuttgart, 1857, p. xii.

lighter vein is like that of Washington Irving in prose, pleasing and graceful, but nothing more. They will doubtless continue to furnish entertainment for an idle hour, and that is all they were intended to do. There is little in them to stir the deeper emotions, as in the most significant passages in "Evangeline" or "Hiawatha," or even in some of our poet's finest lyrics.

Compared with the lofty ideals exemplified in Longfellow's best work, his dramatic writings seem almost puerile. It is in these that his weakest points are most conspicuous. His culture, which stands him in such good stead in his ordinary narratives, here becomes a positive hindrance. His imaginative faculties and his constructive power seem paralyzed. Properly speaking, these are not dramas at all. The strange part of it all was that the poet sincerely hoped that his trilogy of "Christus" would be the work which would carry his name through the ages. Nothing could be more majestic than the theme, nothing more disappointing than its treatment. While the poet was so absorbed with his subject, he was, as his diary shows, not without grave misgivings as to the result. The second part, "The Golden Legend," relieves the series from the imputation of literary failure. There the poet is on favorite ground. Mediæval legends, myths, and superstitions form the accessories to the main subject, — the self-sacrificing love of the heroine for the unfortunate prince. The subject was suggested by *Der Arme Heinrich* of Hartmann von der Aue, a minnesinger of the twelfth century. The poem has been deservedly praised by John Ruskin for its faithful portraiture of monkish life in the Middle Ages. Aside from its dramatic pretensions, it is a noteworthy production, and in spite of its origin, is truly Longfellow's



own. Yet we should hesitate a long while before accepting the judgment of both G. P. R. James and Bayard Taylor in pronouncing it a greater poem than "Evangeline." Longfellow's avowed object was "to show, among other things, that through the darkness and corruption of the Middle Ages ran a bright, deep stream of Faith, strong enough for all exigencies of life and death." It was just the sort of theme to enlist the author's poetic sympathies as it was the lack of congeniality between the poet and the subjects of the other parts of the trilogy that gave them the effects of perfunctory workmanship. Though the monologues of Abbot Joachim and Martin Luther are in themselves fine poems, they can hardly be said to add greatly to the value of "Christus" as a whole. The different periods of the trilogy are too far separated to be bridged over by even such exalted strains as are forced to do duty as connecting passages. It is questionable if the poet's design would not have been equally apparent by the simple arrangement of the parts in historical sequence without the artificial aid of these explanatory verses. The design in its very grandeur was a vague one, and the "mystery" is neither simplified nor complicated by the injection of these superfluous "Interludes."

Some conception of the development of literary taste in this country may be gathered from the fact that before 1807 Dante was virtually unknown in America. In that year Lorenzo da Ponte, a Venetian, lectured in New York upon the Italian poet. "Yet he accomplished little to remove the ignorance of Dante which had prevailed ever since the country was settled."<sup>1</sup> In 1822 appeared the first American reprint of an Eng-

<sup>1</sup> Article on Dante by Philip C. Knapp, Jr., in *Encyc. Amer.*

lish version of Dante (Cary's), and in 1830 Dr. Griffin lectured to the students of Columbia College on Dante and Italian literature. After removing to Cambridge, Longfellow supplemented Mr. Ticknor's labors in Italian literature, and lectured on Dante. Extracts of his translations from the "Purgatorio" were published with the "Voices of the Night" in 1839. He continued his work of study and translation in a desultory sort of way until 1853, when he seems to have fully determined to complete his work. In 1865 ten copies of the "Inferno" were printed, half the number being sent to Florence as the translator's tribute to the celebration of the six hundredth anniversary of the poet's birth. But the translation of the three parts was not completed for general publication until 1867.

The tardiness of America in appreciating the genius of Dante has been in a measure atoned in later years. It was an American who discovered Giotto's portrait of Dante, and the labors of our own scholars have done much to popularize in this country the works of the divine Florentine. Longfellow's translation has received the warmest encomiums from Dantean scholars, who do not hesitate to pronounce it the best that has yet appeared in the English language. The general reader, however, is likely to rise from its perusal with a feeling of disappointment. In sacrificing the rhymes of the original in favor of a strict line-for-line and almost word-for-word rendering, the melodious rhythm of the Italian is superseded by a diction that is often strained and harsh. Special value and interest are contributed to Mr. Longfellow's work by the notes and comments appended to each part, forming an excellent commentary on the life and times of Dante as revealed in "The Divine Comedy."

Longfellow himself once wrote: "The highest exercise of imagination is not to devise what otherwise has no existence, but rather to perceive what really exists, though unseen by the outward eye, — not creation, but insight." It was in his detection and description of hidden beauties, rather than in strength of original creation, that his great power lay. No other poet could so thoroughly idealize the aboriginal myths of our woods and streams, so artistically reproduce the mysticism of mediæval lore, and so brighten our households with the exquisite music of his words. Longfellow was the most popular poet that America has produced. His poetry has been grafted into the literature of nearly every living language in Europe. Royalty did him honor, and the common people heard him gladly. From the Queen to the cabman in the street, the English showed their appreciation of him, and his birthday was celebrated as a gala day by the children of his native land. There was surely something more than superficial glamour in work that so elicited the admiration of the world. No mere "poet of the commonplace" could thus stir men's feelings. His themes, it is true, were often commonplace, just as life and love, death and sorrow, are commonplace, as belonging to the common experience of mankind. But he was no less successful in unhackneyed subjects like "Evangeline," "Hiawatha," and "Miles Standish." It is because he designed his themes with a true poetic fancy, and invested them with a true artistic beauty, that his songs sink deep into the memory and refuse to be displaced. He sympathized with suffering in any form, and it is because his verse pulsates with the heart-throbs of humanity that human nature instinctively recognizes him as one of its noblest exemplars.

He sang in fascinating rhythm of the joys and griefs that beset every household, and it is because these songs touched the hearts and consciences of the people, as few such writings can touch them, that he has been called the poet-laureate of the Anglo-Saxon home.

To us of to-day, removed from the magnetism of personal contact with the poet, and to whom his name, aside from his works, has chiefly an historic interest, Longfellow is still the most prominent member of that group of singers which shed such lustre on American letters. The personal traits which endeared him to his friends may well be emulated by all aspirants for literary honors. Unswervingly loyal to his art, he conscientiously labored to develop the rare talents that had been intrusted to him. Serenely oblivious of honeyed flattery or malicious abuse through his long and gentle life, he upheld the exalted ideal of his youth, bequeathing to his country an honored fame and a cherished name.

In Longfellow's works may be witnessed the highest development of literary culture in American verse. What the poet might have done uninfluenced by foreign masters it is idle to conjecture. He assumed all literature for his province and accomplished more than any other writer in popularizing American verse abroad. His workmanship is especially noteworthy for its artistic finish. He has shown the identity between simplicity and elegance, gracefulness and vigor. He was a noble embodiment of culture, as distinguished from mere scholarship. Yet how slightly effective mere culture may be when combined with exquisite poetic taste rather than poetic talent, is shown in the impression created by the work of some of our minor poets.

On the 28th day of December, 1846, Mr. Longfellow

noted in his diary: "There is a great 'stampede' on Parnassus at the present moment, a furious rushing to and fro of the steeds of Apollo. Emerson's Poems; Story's Poems; Read's Poems; Channing's Poems, — all in one month." Only the author of the first named of these four volumes succeeded in guiding his courser into the true empyrean, though Story's Pegasus has travelled at a reasonably uniform rate, neither slacking his pace nor startling his admirers with any special literary vagaries.

William Wetmore Story (1819-1895), a native of Salem, was educated for the bar, and discharged his obligation to his profession in the compilation of several volumes of law reports and a two-volume edition of the life and letters of his distinguished father. His legal training manifests itself in his remarkable narrative poem, "A Roman Lawyer in Jerusalem," wherein the skill of the special pleader is modified by the reverent spirit of a refined poet. But art proved more congenial than the law, and Massachusetts lost a promising young jurist, while Italy gained a noteworthy sculptor and poet. His verse is easy, elevated and correct, but it is the verse of a sculptor with whom form is everything. It must be admitted, too, that while there is nothing in his mature verse to betray his nationality, save the occasional appearance of so-called Americanisms in his diction, he has not been without his obligation to American literature, as reflected in certain echoes of Longfellow and Holmes.

Story's intellectual powers, however, were of too high an order to rest at imitation. His narratives and dialogues hold a place entirely their own in our literature. The vein of melancholy which Hawthorne was surprised to observe among Story's personal traits runs

through the artist's narratives and lyrics. This tone of sadness leaves an impression of "beauty akin to pain" impossible to resist, but utterly different from the Byronic despair which afflicted the songsters of Story's youth. He is a master of expression, though his facile command of language occasionally leads to an infringement of the rule which he so felicitously announced in his "Couplets."

The works of T. W. Parsons (1819-1892), like those of Story, plainly show the influence of foreign residence and study. It is not impossible that he will be more familiar to posterity, as the "poet" mentioned in the "Tales of a Wayside Inn," than as the author of some of our most melodious verse. The charm of his writings is in their chaste and earnest diction, in the highest form of art. He was never a poet of the people, though no collection of American poetry seems complete without his "Lines on a Bust of Dante." His verse is strong and clear, and in its sincere, devout spirit seems like an earnest protest against many of the tendencies in modern life and thought. An elaborate edition of his translation of the "Inferno" was published in 1867. It naturally challenged comparison with that of Longfellow, appearing in the same year. While not so faithful as that of the elder poet, its very freedom enables the translator the better to preserve the spirit of the original. For the general reader rather than the student it must be admitted to be the more readable of the two.

Literary culture, which proved almost fatal to Longfellow's dramatic attempts, seems to have had quite the contrary effect upon the work of some of our minor poets. George H. Calvert (1803-1889) and George H. Boker (1823-1890) both owed much of their success

to the influence of taste and culture. John Howard Payne, of the preceding generation, wrote much but originated little. His claims as a dramatist are the slightest, and his fame rests on a single lyric. To George H. Boker, of Philadelphia, man of the world and diplomat, belongs the distinction of not only writing some of the best lyrics and sonnets in our literature, but also of being the most successful poetic dramatist that America has produced. While "classical" in form, his works are refreshingly free from the high-stepping twaddle to which at one time our tragic muse seemed hopelessly wedded. It may be said of all his plays that they possess the essentials of true drama, — life, action, and feeling. The best known of these doubtless owes much of its popularity to its fine interpretation on the stage by Lawrence Barrett.

The last and youngest of this list of cosmopolitan poets to be considered is one whose versatility of genius would have given him an honorable position in almost any field of literature. Bayard Taylor (1825-1878), like Boker, was a native of Pennsylvania, but, unlike him, was not born to opulence. Taylor was a hearty, sincere man of affairs, generous, frank, and thoroughly manly, his mind polished by attrition with many men of many lands, equally at home in the frozen North, in the tropics, in the miners' camps of the far West, on the desert sands of the Orient, in the peaceful Quaker village, or in the throngs of the bustling metropolis. He wrote verses at twelve and printed them at sixteen. In his twentieth year the obscure country youth set out to make a European journey on foot, with scarce any capital beyond an ever-active brain and a never-daunted will. On his last European trip he left as the accredited minister to one of the

world's greatest powers, cheered and inspired by kindest words from the renowned poets of his native land. In his thirty-four years of literary labor, Taylor published as author, editor, or translator, no less than fifty-two volumes. His literary career may be said to date from the publication in 1844 of his little volume, "Ximena, or the Battle of the Sierra Morena, and Other Poems," long since out of print. But his true poetic fame dates from 1848, when he published his "Rhymes of Travel." As he essayed nearly every department of literature in prose and verse, fiction and history, travel and biography, criticism and satire, without being absolutely great in any, so he attained a moderate degree of success in equally diverging regions of song. Like Longfellow, he attempted with varying success the lyric, idyllic, dramatic, patriotic, and even elegiac.

Taylor's exuberant rhetoric is both his strength and his weakness. Of this he early gave evidence in his lyrics "Taurus" and "Moan ye Wild Winds." He wrote his "California Ballads" when the future laureate of the Pacific coast had barely passed his first decade. It was of the California before "the days of forty-nine" that Taylor sang his brief but sad memorial, — of the old soon to yield to the new, as the moaning music of the Monterey pines was to be forever stilled by the destroying axe of pioneer and settler.

In all his later writings he never surpassed the glowing, passionate imagery of his "Poems of the Orient." He seemed to have caught the very spirit of the far East and interpreted it as none of our writers before or since. It was like an infusion of tropical blood into the somewhat stiff and formal body of our American verse. This little volume was published in 1855, the



same year with Longfellow's "Hiawatha." The appearance of two such works, dealing with old themes in a manner so unconventional to American readers, shows the advance made since the days when stilted Indian "epics" and distorted Biblical legends formed the stock in trade of native and foreign topics for American versifiers. The great gulf fixed between the so-called "Sacred Poems" of Willis and Taylor's "Poems of the Orient" represents only a dozen years in time, but an indefinite period in the development of the poetic spirit. By this publication Taylor at once placed himself at the head of our minor poets. In his higher strains he seemed to unite the lyrical music of Poe with the artistic finish of Longfellow.

None of our verse writers, aside from the Cambridge poet, has given so much attention to form. His most elaborate narrative poem, "The Picture of St. John," shows his skilful use of a uniform measure with more than seventy variations in the order of rhyme. It is a tragic tale, replete with magnificent passages, florid descriptions, and fervid rhetoric, — a richly, colored succession of word-pictures. In spite of its highly polished workmanship, it fails to appeal to the heart as closely as do the unpretentious home pastorals and Pennsylvania ballads; just as the effect of his stately, sonorous Fourth-of-July Ode delivered at the Philadelphia centennial fell short of that produced by the few unaffected stanzas written by Whittier for the opening of the exposition.

In 1873 Taylor published what must generally be regarded as his masterpiece, "Lars, a Pastoral of Norway." It is a simple idyl, well and simply told, though there are passages flashing with spirit and disclosing strong dramatic power. It has been deservedly accorded

a place by the side of "Evangeline" and "Snow-Bound," among our successful idyllic poems. The contrasts between the life and customs of Norway and those of the quiet Pennsylvania village are drawn with force and skill. To Mr. Taylor is undoubtedly due the credit of giving us the noblest representation of the Quaker heroine in American poetry. The pure but strong character of Ruth is presented with a delicacy of touch which betokens the genuine master. The whole poem in its theme and execution is refreshingly unhackneyed and original.

Taylor possessed in an eminent degree the essential qualities of a translator. He was able, by a sort of intuition, to absorb the meaning of a great singer and reproduce almost the exact form and spirit. No better test could be made of his belief in the efficacy of form than an attempt to reproduce all the original metres of "Faust," and no stronger argument could be used than the success with which he exemplified his theories.

Our poet's success in reproducing a foreign drama was by no means equalled in his original dramatic writings. "The Masque of the Gods" (1872) is a classic drama, of noble conception, with here and there a splendid passage, but as a whole, unsatisfactory, as is not surprising in a theme so vast as the correlation of the world's religions. "The Prophet" (1874) was even less successful. This was an attempt to throw the glamour of poetry over a certain phase of "Americanism," which in every feature is thoroughly repulsive to high ideals. Mormonism has produced countless tragedies in every-day life, but is utterly unsuited to a poetic drama for the present generation. The lyrical drama, "Prince Deukalion" (1878), was his last work, his "swan-song," as his wife and biographer terms it.

Here again the execution falls far below the vast design, — an effort to symbolize the progress of humanity from savagery to perfection. The author intended it as his greatest work, and Longfellow himself paid it a graceful tribute. There are in it resounding lines recalling Taylor at his best. But the exquisite finish of some portions makes only more conspicuous the mechanical effect of a great part of the work.

The same qualities which made Taylor a good translator made him an excellent mimic. His "Echo Club and Other Literary Diversions" (1876) contains some clever travesties, interspersed with good off-hand critical discussions. The parodies upon Poe, Browning, and himself — most of the work was first published anonymously in the "Atlantic Monthly" for 1872 — were particularly good. The little book deserved a much better fate than it received at the hands of the public. It is one of the brightest and wittiest productions in the literature of criticism.

Though Taylor accomplished much as traveller, lecturer, novelist, critic, and editor, it was to the name and fame of poet that he most aspired. Yet the chief impression gathered from a careful study of his poetry, as a whole, is one of regret, — regret that such high ideals failed of realization, regret that such undoubted talents should have been so widely diffused as to prevent absolute greatness in any one direction. On the other hand, that he failed to reach the most exalted heights, is no reason for withholding our gratitude for his unquestionably noble work.

The few singers who have been noticed thus far in this chapter are sufficient to prove the influence of culture upon American song. Since the appearance of Longfellow's "Voices of the Night," in 1839, beauty

has asserted its true sovereignty, and art has been accorded the consideration that was its due. A poet, a painter, or musician is none the less a poet, painter, or musician for the pains bestowed upon his work, or for the study and thought necessary for its elaboration. Critics who decry culture in poesy seem to assume that the fires of inspiration should always leap spontaneously and consume by a process of mental self-ignition. The fires that are kept in perennial glow upon the altar by the hands of devoted ministrants are no less brilliant than the spasmodic flame that leaps to light from some unexpected source. As long as the glow of inspiration is present, shedding its warmth and light with impartial force, we care not how it is enkindled and sustained. "Beauty is truth, truth beauty." Longfellow did not hesitate to replenish his torch at foreign altars, but the light that he diffused, passing through the crystal lens of his poetic genius, became entirely his own. The same may be said of the less renowned singers mentioned in connection with his name, who, if not innately great poets, aided in spreading the light of refined art and taste, inculcating broader feelings and more enlightened sympathies with all that may tend toward the true and the beautiful.

Whether Longfellow was more successful as a lyric than as a narrative poet is of little importance. It is sufficient that he excelled in both the lyric and idyllic. If, however, the true character of lyric, as distinguished from other poetry, lies in its subjectivity, Edgar Allen Poe (1809-1849) was unquestionably our greatest lyric poet. Even in his unsuccessful narrative poems, "Al Araaf" and "Tamerlane," and in his still more unsuccessful dramatic effort, "Politian," he finds it impossible to repress his individual feelings and emotions.

But it is not with such experiments that the fame of Poe is to be associated. Like Coleridge, before him, and Bryant, contemporaneously with him, he expressed his distrust of "long poems," believing about a hundred lines to be the proper extreme limit of any metrical effort. As applied to his own capabilities, Poe's theory was undoubtedly correct. In his poetry his lyric verse alone bears the stamp of true genius, and it is as a lyrist only that he is to be considered our most original poet. But even his case is not an exception to the general rule that there is no modern singer in whose verse cannot be discerned echoes of other voices.

At the beginning of Poe's literary career, Bryant was the only known American poet of enduring fame. Poe lived long enough, however, to record his disdain of Longfellow and Emerson, his dislike of Whittier, and patronizing pity for Lowell. He could see no beauty in Wordsworth, and regarded Burns as an absurdly overrated poet. A sciolist in culture, he had the knack of giving to his writings the effect of profound erudition. His criticisms were superficial, frequently flippant and even spiteful, though he vastly benefited American letters in puncturing and exposing much of the shallow pretentiousness of the time that arrogated to itself the name of literature. He despised literary impostors, though himself not always superior to the artifice that he condemned in others. He early registered his protest against the tendency to make poetry a study rather than a passion; yet, if he himself is to be credited, his greatest masterpiece was the result of most deliberate and systematic study. Of an impulsive and aggressive nature, he was, in his powers of will, a weakling. Fully conscious of the strength that was in him, he was equally conscious of his fatal

weakness. With a persistency that was agonizing in its desperation, he fought his arch-enemy, struggling against inherited conditions, perhaps impossible wholly to eradicate, until his wretched fate at last made him the theme for the mocking scorn of those who, in comparison with himself, were the merest intellectual pygmies.

While still in his Byronic period, not yet out of his teens, he wrote:—

“In visions of the dark night  
I have dreamed of joys departed,  
But a waking dream of life and light  
Hath left me broken-hearted.”

It is seldom that the languishing despair affected by verse-smitten youth so accurately foreshadows a life's horoscope.

The charms of poetry were doubtless none the less seductive for being “forbidden things.” While affecting to disregard popular opinion, the contemptuous indifference with which his efforts were received could not fail to sting. It is not difficult to fancy the bitterness that must have reigned in his proudly sensitive soul. He was without honor even in his own household. He chafed and railed at his misfortunes, and, like many another neglected genius, sought refuge in gloom and despair. The poetical “Preface” of his 1829 volume was considerably enlarged as an “Introduction” to the edition of 1831, the added lines being afterward suppressed. There is one passage in these suppressed verses which seems like a shadow forecast by coming events:—

“I could not love except where Death  
Was mingling his with Beauty's breath—  
Or Hymen, Time, and Destiny  
Were stalking between her and me.”

One of the most striking traits about Poe is his reverence for noble womanhood. Early in youth his quick sensibilities were aroused by kindly words from the mother of one of his boy friends. The young lad, unaccustomed to appreciative notice, became at once her ardent worshipper.

Into her listening ear he would pour the story of his real or fancied wrongs, and was always certain of exciting sympathy. The death of this honored friend, under circumstances peculiarly tragical, left Edgar disconsolate. Mrs. Whitman has drawn a romantic picture of the stricken orphan lad keeping nightly vigil at the tomb of his benefactress. "When the nights were very dreary and cold, when the autumnal rains fell, and the winds wailed mournfully over the graves, he lingered longest and came away most regretfully." At this time Poe was fifteen and already accustomed to unburden his heart in verse. But it was his grief at the death of this lady, "the one idolatrous and purely ideal love" of his boyhood, more than anything else, that enkindled the spark of his genius. It was in her memory that his early lines, "To Helen," were written. This little poem was not published until 1831, when the author was twenty-two, but was probably written some years before. It is one of the most perfect lyrics ever penned by youthful singer. This sorrow cast its shadow far into the coming years and inspired the poems, "The Pæan," afterward developed into the impassioned dirge, "Lenore" and "Irene," subsequently entitled "The Sleeper." Henceforward the memories of the silent dead, the shadows of the lonely tomb, were to haunt him throughout life, embodied occasionally in the fantastic imagery that distinguishes "Ulalume" and "The City of the Sea." Later, his

rejection by the maiden of his choice only intensified his already morbid nature, leading him to apprehend nothing but darkness and despair for his heritage.

Poe's poetical product was slight in bulk. Aside from his juvenile publication in 1827, he published but three volumes of verse: one at Baltimore in 1829; a revised edition at New York in 1831, with its dedication to the West Point cadets, from whom he received only ridicule for his pains; and a still further enlarged and revised collection under the name of "The Raven and Other Poems," at New York in 1845. The last named contained probably all his verse written up to that time that he considered worth publishing, including portions of "Politian." The manuscript of the unprinted parts of that dramatic poem subsequently passed into the hands of Mr. Ingram, who wisely abstained from publishing what would add nothing to the poet's fame.

Prior to 1845, Poe's poems attracted little notice. In 1833, when his fortunes seemed to be at their lowest, he scored his first financial success. It was in that year that his prose tale, "MS. Found in a Bottle," and his blank-verse poem, "The Coliseum," originally written as a soliloquy in "Politian," were both deemed worthy of prizes offered by the "Baltimore Saturday Visitor." It was held inexpedient to bestow both prizes upon the same competitor, and he was awarded the larger one, a hundred dollars, for his prose tale. His prose contributions to the Baltimore periodical, and subsequently to the Richmond "Southern Literary Messenger," were winning for him an enviable name in the world of letters, but his poetry was ignored. He returned to the North in 1837, and the remainder of his literary life was spent in New York and Philadel-



phia. He continued his labors as editor and contributor with varying success. As a romance writer he was winning fresh laurels every year. Though he was ill paid and sorely beset, America was beginning to acknowledge his genius. His articles were stolen by the English magazines and had already made an impression in France, where his works are now read and translated more than those of any other American.

Mr. Ingram was the first writer to demonstrate the resemblance between "The Raven" and Albert Pike's poem on "Isadore," written a year or two earlier, and more properly known by the title of "The Widowed Heart." These similarities are fully set forth by Mr. Ingram in his life of Poe and in a variorum edition of "The Raven" published in London in 1885, and need not be repeated here.

While Poe was editing the "Broadway Journal" there appeared in its columns a little poem entitled "To Isadore," so manifestly the work of Poe that Ingram was justified in including it in his edition of Poe's poems. This lyric, "To Isadore," was published several months after Pike's poem, and has so much in common with it, besides the name of the subject, that its origin seems apparent. In tracing the genesis of "The Raven," Mr. Ingram makes no mention of this lyric, yet, if really the work of Poe, as seems reasonably certain, it is strong corroboration of Ingram's theory of one source of Poe's most famous poem.

Pike's ballad undoubtedly exerted its influence on Poe, but the suggestion as to the origin of the chief figure in Poe's poem must be sought elsewhere. When the introductory chapters of "Barnaby Rudge" first appeared in America early in 1841, Poe wrote out his "prospective review," so shrewdly anticipating the de-

nouement of the complicated plot as to elicit from Mr. Dickens the startled inquiry whether his American critic held communication with the devil. Upon the completion of the novel, Poe ventured to make some comments on the dramatic possibilities to which the croakings of a raven could be turned. It seems, therefore, no very violent assumption that "Grip" was the legitimate progenitor of Poe's "ungainly fowl." The latter undoubtedly underwent a long period of incubation, before he was finally able to sally forth from "Night's Plutonian Shore" to take up his abode in the "home by horror haunted." It is not necessary entirely to reject Poe's own statement as to the genesis of his poem, in order to accept Mr. Ingram's ingenious theory regarding the origin of "The Raven." However it may be, the treatment of the subject is Poe's own, in spite of certain echoes from Mrs. Browning's "Geraldine's Courtship." He is fully entitled to all the glory that it shed upon his name. In few of his poems is the conception so fully wrought out, the meaning so clear and the underlying thought so perfectly developed. It is no wonder that the reading world was taken by storm. It was written for "The American Whig Review" for February, 1845, and was heralded by a turgid and verbose introduction, inspired, if not actually indicted, by the poet himself. Before its appearance in the "Whig Review," Mr. Willis was allowed to print it in advance in the "Evening Mirror" for January 29, 1845. This he did with a laudatory notice almost as absurd as the one in the "Review." To the last named date is to be ascribed the first appearance of a poem destined to a world-wide celebrity. Readers who could not comprehend the indefinite imagery of "Lenore," "The Haunted Palace,"

"The Conqueror Worm," and "Dreamland," could grasp this poem at a single reading. In it the sound and sense were so harmoniously blended as to appeal to the sensibilities of the most obtuse. Its fame became international, and the author's genius, so long neglected and misunderstood, was at last recognized. Its success was sufficient to turn a cooler head than Poe's. He himself once pronounced it the greatest poem in the world. This was shortly after it was finished, evidently before the ardor of composition had sufficiently cooled to enable him to form a candid judgment. Certain it is that he afterward modified his opinion, for he wrote that, in the true basis of all art, "The Sleeper" was the superior poem, though he believed that "not one man in a million could be brought to agree with" him in that opinion. What he wrote of "The Sleeper" may with equal truth be applied to such lyrics as "The City in the Sea," "The Conqueror Worm," "The Haunted Palace," "For Annie," and "Ulalume." It is in these that his lyrical genius is the least restrained. In these his powers of inspiration take their strongest, highest flight, not into the pure empyrean of celestial hope and faith, but soaring on the pinions of doubt and despair into the upper realms of blackest gloom, —

"Flapping from out their condor wings  
Invisible wo!"

invisible, indeed, to the grosser vision, but acting upon the inner sense like strains of weird, unearthly music. His conceptions, though vague, are startling. He can exorcise from the land of shadows a doomed city of sin, whose spires and minarets gleam with a fantastic light, but fall and crumble as noiselessly as they arose. He pictures Death as rearing a throne in

a strange city, "far down within the dim West," where all "have gone to their eternal rest." All about the waters lie like "a wilderness of glass," undisturbed by a single ripple, unswept by a single breeze, "all things hideously serene." Even in the final catastrophe the oppressive silence remains unbroken. The slight sinking of the towers causes a sudden movement in the "dull tide."

"The waves have now a redder glow,  
The hours are breathing faint and low —  
And when, amid no earthly moans,  
Down, down that town shall settle hence,  
Hell rising from a thousand thrones  
Shall do it reverence."

Still more startling in its imagery is the conception of that motley drama with —

"Much of madness and more of sin,  
And horror the soul of the plot."

A veiled and weeping angel throng is depicted as seated in the theatre, watching "a play of hopes and fears," —

"While the orchestra breathes fitfully  
The music of the spheres."

Humanity is represented as "Mimes in the form of God on high," who "mutter and mumble low," mere puppets who act —

"At bidding of vast formless things  
That shift the scenery to and fro."

It is the destiny of this "mimic rout" to become the prey of —

"A blood-red thing that writhes from out  
The scenic solitude."

"Out, out are the lights — out all!  
And over each quivering form  
The curtain, a funeral pall,  
Comes down with a rush of the storm.  
And the angels, all pallid and wan,  
Uprising, unveiling, affirm  
That the play is the tragedy 'Man,'  
And its hero, the conqueror worm."

The narrowness of Poe's imaginative genius is obvious from his constantly dwelling upon one theme, — that of destruction, whether of the body or mind. With glowing words and melodious rhythm he sings of reason dethroned or consciousness entombed. The subject of sentience after death was one that engrossed his mind continually, and appears and reappears in his prose and verse. The ballad of "Ulalume" was written in 1847. The poet, still distraught by the death of his idolized child-wife, shattered in health, and impoverished in fortune, was nearing the borderland of insanity. Though not yet out of his thirties, he lived among the ghosts and shadows of a wasted life, in a world peopled with the horrors of a Dantean Inferno.

"There sighs, complaints, and ululations loud  
Resounded through the air without a star."

It was under such circumstances that the poet composed his "Ulalume," pronounced by a competent critic, "the extreme limit of Poe's original genius." The poem will not stand criticism. Many of its lines and rhymes are indefensible. Yet, in spite of its faults, it is an exquisite lyric. It comes like a wail of suffering, wrenched from a tortured, baffled soul, whose very anguish finds expression only in a melodious rhythm. The vagueness of its fantasies is forgotten in the effect of its irresistible music. In spite of the

bitter arraignment by Mr. R. H. Stoddard, all classes of minds, healthy and otherwise, have been impressed by the little poem, and if, as that critic asserts, "no musical sense was ever gratified with its measure," it is difficult to explain away its subtle charm.

Poe's devotion to his wife and her mother, the "more than mother" to him, should go far in mitigating the severe censures that some have seen fit to cast upon his private life. In his last poem, the memory of his beautiful young wife is so fitly enshrined that it is as the sane and sorrowing author of "Annabel Lee" that his friends and admirers love to regard him. This little lyric is really a tribute to the "love that was more than love" which he bore to his idolized Virginia, who so far surpassed anything earthly as to be akin only to the angels above, —

"So that her high-born kinsmen came  
And bore her away from me,  
To shut her up in her sepulchre,  
In this kingdom by the sea."

It was peculiarly fitting that the last notes of his lyre, ere it fell from his hand forever, should vibrate responsive to the purest feelings that animated his whole career. For the remaining months of his life, the chords were to remain silent while he himself was marching to his tragic end. In that supreme moment, as he lay dying in the hospital, the easy victim of Baltimore political roughs, how vain and unsatisfying his notions of life and art, how empty and shallow his theories of pantheism as expounded in his prose poem of "Eureka," must have seemed to him, may be inferred, as in the agony of his tortured brain, he breathed the last and perhaps the only sincere prayer of his life, "Lord help my poor soul!" These last words that ever passed

his lips sound like a confession that, after all, something more than mere abstract beauty is essential to satisfy the yearnings of human nature.

Poe has suffered almost as much from indiscriminate panegyrists as from malignant detractors. Now that the generation that knew him for good and for ill has passed away, and with it all personal prejudices and predilections, it is possible to consider his work in that impartial spirit which he himself would have demanded. His most devoted admirers must admit the narrowness of his poetic range. Within those narrow limits he stands peerless among our purely lyrical singers. He was in no sense of the abused term a "national poet." He was not even a humanitarian one. Yet contracted as was his imaginative power the world itself was not broad enough for his song. In the land of dreams, fairies, clouds, and shadows he wandered. The hopes, fears, and aspirations of struggling humanity were as nothing to him. Beauty alone, in his judgment, was the purpose of poetry—truth only as subordinate to beauty; heroism, patriotism, love of home, of honor, or of duty, or any of the sublimer virtues, had no place as such in his realm of song. The Greek dramatists he brushed aside with contempt, though he could speak patronizingly of Milton. It must be admitted that he remained true to his ideals, in spite of temptations to prostitute his talents. Rather would he eat the crust of poverty than permit his poetic passions to be excited "with an eye to the paltry compensations, or the more paltry commendations of mankind." He instinctively hated didacticism, yet his verse is as pure and free from moral blemish as the most exacting could demand. As in his prose he fell short of Hawthorne's power to sound the depths of the human soul, so in his verse he failed

to reach the divine heights scaled by his great master, Coleridge. His imagination was vivid, but not profound. His descriptions, analytical almost to tediousness in his prose, are purposely vague and indefinite in his verse. His conceptions, as he remarks of those of Shelley, are seldom perfectly wrought out. Yet his undoubted originality, his fantastically gorgeous imagery, the stirring music of his song, the sweetness and melody of his diction, and his epigrammatic expressions of thought at once stamp his poetry as the work of a man of genius and individuality.

The literary faults of Poe are as sharply defined as his merits. His tendency to subordinate sense to sound, and his verbal affectations, such as his use of terms rare and obsolete, or in a sense removed from their legitimate meanings, are among his most obvious mannerisms. But perhaps his gravest offence was the assumption of a profound learning which he by no means possessed. One of his biographers is inclined to regard him as the most scholarly writer our country has produced. "His acquaintance with classical literature," we are assured, "was thorough. His familiarity with modern literature was extensive, while of English literature it can be truly said he knew it from the very source. Even the most insignificant of his writings show scholarship." Poe enjoyed nothing so much as to hoax the reading public, and through the verisimilitude of some of his tales and sketches, often produced the desired effect. But the most successful of all his impositions were the displays of erudition which inspired such awe in the minds of some of his admirers. Poe's singular error concerning the authorship of "*Œdipus at Colonus*" may have been uttered through carelessness rather than ignorance, but no such excuse can be urged for other inaccuracies



scattered throughout his works. Mr. Woodberry was probably the first to do full justice to Poe's pretensions in this respect. It is sufficient to cite one flagrant example, the case of the note to his well-known lyric "Israfel." Originally it read, "And the angel Israfel, who has the sweetest voice of all God's creatures: *Koran*." The passage, as Mr. Woodberry points out, is not in the *Koran*, but in Sale's "Preliminary Discourse." In the notes to Moore's "Lallah Rookh," where Poe found it, it is correctly attributed to Sale. At a later time Poe "interpolated the entire phrase, 'whose heart-strings are a lute' (the idea on which the poem is founded), which is neither in Moore, Sale, nor the *Koran*." "With this highly original emendation," adds his biographer, "the note now stands in his works as an extract from the *Koran*."

No especial fault, perhaps, is to be found with Poe for his habit of republishing in the magazines, as new, remodelled versions of his own pieces which had already been printed. These alterations are almost invariably improvements on the originals. Not so commendable was his custom of inscribing the same lines as personal tributes to different individuals. Thus the little poem beginning "Beloved! amid the earnest woes," he first published in 1835 as a tribute "To Mary." After transposing the stanzas he republished it in 1842, addressed "To One Departed," and in 1845 he printed it for a third time, and as intended for Mrs. Frances Sargent Osgood. Another short poem, "Thou Would'st Be Loved?" was originally written to Miss White, and published in 1835. In 1839, slightly altered, it was reprinted and addressed "To —," and finally, in 1845, once more pressed into service, this time as another tribute to Mrs. Osgood, who has been allowed to remain

the last and undisputed subject of both poems. That estimable lady, so far from resenting these tributes at third hand, was profoundly grateful to the poet, and to her dying day was one of his most earnest defenders.

Poe's personal traits have been too widely exploited to need further discussion here. His shortcomings have been pitilessly exposed. The sanctity of his home has been invaded, and the veil ruthlessly drawn from his domestic life. Weaknesses that have been condoned in other literary men have been made matters of bitterest reproach against him. Actual inability to meet financial obligations has been imputed to him as premeditated dishonesty. Inherited tendencies, against which he valiantly strove, have been exaggerated and misrepresented. His chivalric deference to womanhood has been misconstrued for insincerity and fickleness. "My whole nature utterly revolts at the idea that there is any being in the universe superior to myself," were the words that he used in commenting on his own theories of cosmogony. This, of course, was said in no spirit of egotism, but simply as regarding himself as a type of universal manhood. Yet he was thoroughly out of touch with humanity. In his estimate of others he was frequently unjust, and, as we have seen, affected a disdain of contemporary applause. It remained for posterity to vindicate his name. He was the second American poet to be honored with a monument after death. His fame increases with the years. A little more than a quarter of a century after he had passed away a cenotaph was reared by the school-teachers of Baltimore above his grave. The tributes that were then received from the greatest living singers in the old world and the new afford some evidence of the honor in which he is held in the repub-

lic of letters. Ten years later the Poe memorial in New York Metropolitan Museum was erected by the actors of America. In England he is the only American poet to contest the popularity of Longfellow, and his works have been translated into French, German, Spanish, and Italian. Besides these, there is said to be a Russian translation of "The Raven." A Latin translation of that poem was published at Oxford and London in 1866, and one in Hungarian appeared at Budapest in 1870. His personal character for good and for bad was probably what might have been expected from one of his nervously sensitive organization, subjected to such a course of training as he received. This should be borne in mind by those who are in such haste to pass judgment upon his private affairs. There need be no disposition to absolve Poe from due moral accountability. Yet, as Burns the man has long been absorbed in Burns the poet, it is not too much to ask a like charitable judgment in behalf of the ill-starred American, in whose verse there is not the shadow of moral uncleanness.

The slanders and misstatements of enemies have been lost in the presence of honors that have been heaped upon his memory by people of two continents. His genius has triumphed over his misfortunes, and a poetic justice has been done to his name. As a poet, he was the incarnation of his own Israfel, "whose heart-strings are a lute." His high-strung spiritual nature seemed so attuned as to be able to give forth only sounds of harmony. He could not utter an unmelodious expression, and a single discordant note sent a tremor of pain through his sensitive organization. His was pre-eminently one of the "Voices of the Night," but never were messages of gloom and despair set to such seductive music.

Among the literary women who inspired much that was best in Poe, the names of three are especially prominent, — Mrs. Estelle Anna Lewis, Mrs. Sarah Helen Whitman, and Mrs. Frances Sargent Osgood. The weak side of Poe's critical genius was manifest when he allowed his chivalric impulses to override his literary judgments, and to bestow praise upon the works of these ladies out of all proportion to actual merit.

Mrs. Lewis (1824–1880), a native of Baltimore, published several volumes of verse. Among these were three tragedies, one of which, "Sappho of Lesbos," passed through at least seven editions, was translated into Greek, and played at Athens. Her early publications profoundly impressed Poe, who wrote a fulsome review of them, and called her a rival of Sappho. Among the last things she wrote were some sonnets in vindication of Poe's memory. Lamartine referred to her as a "female Petrarch." Yet, within ten years after her death, she had been so completely forgotten that she was not deemed worthy a place in Stedman and Hutchinson's exhaustive "Library of American Literature." Of one of her lyrics, "The Forsaken," Poe deliberately declared: "The popular as well as the critical voice ranks it as the most beautiful ballad of the kind ever written."

Mrs. Whitman of Providence was the Helen of Poe's later years, and inspired his poem beginning, "I saw thee once, — once only, — years ago." She was conditionally betrothed to the poet, and though the engagement was broken, throughout her life remained his loyal defender. She was a pure and noble woman, with reference to whose relations with Poe, it has been truly said that her saintly life might well atone for his

sad and stormy career. She outlived her poetic fame, but will be remembered as the author of "Edgar Poe and his Critics" (1860), a warm defence of the poet. Her verse evinces both tenderness and passion, but aside from the tributes to Poe, possesses but little interest.

The most gifted of the three was Mrs. Osgood (1811-1850), a native of Boston and wife of the artist S. S. Osgood. Her imagination was not of the loftiest kind, though Poe praised it, adding with characteristic enthusiasm: "In that indescribable something which, for want of a more definite term, we are accustomed to call 'grace,' — that charm so magical because at once so shadowy and so potent, that Will-o'-the-Wisp, which in its supreme development may be said to involve nearly all that is valuable in poetry, — she has unquestionably no rival among her countrywomen." Her first volume, "A Wreath of Wild Flowers from New England," published in London in 1839, was favorably reviewed by the periodicals of England and America. While in Great Britain, Mrs. Osgood was the friend of Rogers, Mrs. Norton, and Sheridan Knowles. She made some claims as a dramatist, but her juvenile lyric, "Little Things," beginning, —

" Little drops of water, little grains of sand  
Make the mighty ocean and the pleasant land,"

has long outlived her ambitious poems and dramatic efforts.

The period under review was especially prolific of feminine singers. To the names of the tuneful sisterhood just mentioned might be added those of Mrs. Sarah J. Hale (1788-1879), Elizabeth F. Ellett (1818-

1877), whom Poe both praised and abused, and Miss Amelia Welby (1819-1852), whom Poe declared possessed "nearly all the imagination of Maria del Occidente, with a more refined taste, and nearly all the passion of Mrs. Norton, with a nicer ear, and (what is surprising) equal art." The list might be easily extended to include a score or more, equally deserving of mention. While conceding to them the deference due to respectable talents, we turn to those who struck the lyre with stronger hand and firmer touch.

Among our artist poets we have produced no truer lyrist than Thomas Buchanan Read (1822-1872), a native of Chester County, Pennsylvania, and in after life, a resident of Cincinnati, New York, Boston, Philadelphia, and later of Italy. By turns, a house painter, sign painter, designer, sculptor, poet, and portrait painter, a literary Bohemian and an æsthetic adventurer, he rose from humblest origin to a position of eminence, and at the time of his death, had an international reputation. Whether painting designs in the rural districts of America, or studying art in Florence, he did his work well and conscientiously. He was neither a great artist nor a great poet, but he painted some good portraits, notably the picture of Longfellow's children, once so popular; he modelled some excellent busts, as that of Sheridan, and wrote some genuine lyrics, as "Drifting," "The Deserted Road," "The Closing Scene," "Passing the Icebergs," "Midnight," and "Rosalie." These, and others like them, show vivid fancy, creative genius, and sympathy with Nature. His martial lyrics, like "Sheridan's Ride," struck the popular fancy, though by no means the best that the Civil War produced, nor equal, in literary merit, to many of his other pieces. His long narra-

tive poems have made no lasting impression. Poe once stigmatized him as an imitator of Longfellow and therefore "but an echo of an echo," a sneer that was cruelly unjust to both poets, and evidently uttered for no other reason than to give vent to the critic's personal feelings. Read admired, loved, and studied Longfellow, but was no more an imitator of the Cambridge poet than was Poe of Coleridge.

In such pieces as "The Deserted Road" and "The Closing Scene," Read's genuine Americanism is apparent, but where the poet's efforts at nationalism are more forced, as in the long poems, "The New Pastoral," and "The Wagoner of the Alleghanies," the result is far from satisfactory. A love of nature, patriotism, and chivalric respect for womanhood are the most obvious traits of Read's Americanism. "The Brave at Home," one of the lyrics interspersed throughout "The Wagoner of the Alleghanies," inspired countless imitations, none of which approached the original in its combination of beauty and simplicity.

"Sheridan's Ride" is a spirited rendering of a picturesque incident of the Civil War. Like all good efforts of its kind, it has suffered more or less from ambitious declaimers. But that is no fault of the poem itself. The lyric, "Drifting," shows the work of both poet and artist, but in all the true essentials of lyric verse, "The Celestial Army" is easily first of all of Read's poems.

The publication of Read's first volume (1846) attracted little attention. Longfellow, ever ready to detect and encourage true merit, gave the young poet words of sympathy and cheer. Even Poe found some good in these lyrics, though he mingled gall and wormwood with the sweetness of his praise. Upon the gen-

eral public, however, these little poems made but slight impression. American criticism was still in its provincial stage, and hesitated to commend literary excellence until some foreign judgment had been favorably pronounced. It was this undue deference to transatlantic opinion that so exasperated Poe. "Is it too much," exclaims the author of 'The Raven,' "to say that with us the opinion of Washington Irving, of Prescott, of Bryant, is a mere nullity in comparison with that of any sub-sub-editor of the 'Spectator,' the 'Athenæum,' or the 'London Punch'?" It is *not* saying too much to say this. There is not a more disgusting spectacle under the sun than our subserviency to British criticism. It is disgusting, first, because it is truckling, servile, pusillanimous; secondly, because of its gross irrationality." What was the immediate cause of this outburst on the part of Poe, it is unnecessary to inquire. Its truth at the time is unquestioned. Our young artist-poet himself must have appreciated its significance. As a poet, Read was still in obscurity in his native country until about 1850, when a writer (presumably Coventry Patmore) in the "North British Review" called attention to Read's poems, praising them lavishly, and extolling "The Closing Scene" above Gray's "Elegy." The same writer pronounced Read the best poet of America. As the same estimate has been placed by British criticism upon nearly every American poet of note from Fenno Hoffman to Walt Whitman, such indiscriminate eulogy would now probably pass unnoticed. Not so half a century ago. "Contemporaneous posterity" in the shape of foreign judgment had then much more weight. The "North British" critique made Read famous. We began to detect hidden beauties in his poems not dreamed of



before. An American poet whose praises were being sounded in England was worth looking into. The good opinions of Longfellow and Poe had been sustained by foreign authority, and Read was awarded a place among the elect. A generous review of his poems by Mr. R. H. Stoddard<sup>1</sup> brought Read still more prominently before the public, and from that time the Pennsylvania poet may be said to have steadily risen in popular favor. He evidently profited by Stoddard's friendly criticism. He outgrew the pretty conceits that characterized much of his earlier work, and in the end gave us some of the most virile and striking verse of that period.

While Poe was editing the "Broadway Journal" in 1845, he received for publication a manuscript poem entitled "Ode on a Grecian Flute." Its author was then unknown in literary circles. Poe, in the columns of his paper, acknowledged receipt of the little poem, but declined to publish it unless convinced of its authenticity. The young author then visited the editor to assure him of the genuineness of the poem. Poe was evidently in ill temper. "He gave me the lie direct," as the author of the "Ode" afterward narrated, "declared that I never wrote it, and threatened to chastise me unless I left him at once."

The world was thus deprived of the privilege of enjoying the fruit of adolescent genius. The crest-fallen author left the editor's presence with mingled feelings of anger and satisfaction, indignant at the gratuitous insults, but secretly elated at the thought that his effusion showed too much merit to be deemed the work of an unknown writer. It was reserved for this young author, the recipient of such an unmannerly

<sup>1</sup> National Magazine (Apr. 1855) VI. 292.

greeting, to be in after years the biographer and editor of the elder poet. Mr. Stoddard was not the man to cherish resentments, and wrought a noble revenge by giving to the world a discriminating and impartial biography of Edgar Poe, prefixed to a carefully prepared six-volume edition of the latter's works.

Richard Henry Stoddard was born at Hingham, Massachusetts, July 2, 1825. He could not therefore have been over twenty when he displayed the hardihood of submitting his work to such a recognized critic as the author of "The Literati." So far from being discouraged at the rebuff, he continued to cultivate his native talents and to improve his taste by intelligent study of the best English writers. He has, in one of his poems, expressed his admiration of Keats, who was his early model. His first volume, "Footprints" (1849), he afterward suppressed. The self-criticism evidenced by the repudiation of his early muse continued to influence him throughout his literary career. His works give evidence of the care and pains bestowed even on his most trifling efforts. In spite of discouraging obstacles, he has gallantly fought his way to a foremost position among American men of letters. As critic, editor, and commentator, he has shown excellent judgment, but it is undoubtedly as a lyric poet that he will hold his place in literature. He is as loyal a devotee of Beauty as was Poe, but far surpasses the latter in his susceptibility to Nature's influence. The lack of the human element in much of his verse is also suggestive of Poe. Through all Stoddard's elegiac poems there darts not one ray of hope. Possibly this may be due to the Orientalism that tinges so much of his poetry. He does not even indulge in that "luxury of woe" which makes Poe's memorial verse read like a

pæan of triumph. If we may venture a prediction, his "Songs of Summer" (1856) will keep his memory alive long after his maturer work is forgotten. We like better to think of him as the author of—

"There are gains for all our losses,  
There are balms for all our pains,"

written in the early summer of his manhood, than as the singer who rejects this hopeful view in his later years to tell us, —

"If I sang that song again  
'T would not be with that refrain  
Which but suits an idle tongue.

"No, the words I sang were idle,  
And will ever so remain;  
Death and Age and vanished Youth  
All declare this bitter truth,  
There's a loss for every gain."

As a writer of odes, Mr. Stoddard stands second only to Lowell in American literature. They all show the lofty tone, the energetic, virile style, the melodious cadences echoing and re-echoing the thought, and the glowing imagination of which he early gave such proof in his "Carmen Naturæ." It is the music of these and some of his shorter lyrics that gives significance to the word "song" in the general sense of poetry. Stoddard is a "singer" in the true meaning of the term.

Before the war the South produced few native lyrists of note. Poe, Pinkney, Wilde, and Pike were born either at the North or abroad. William Gilmore Simms (1806-1870) published several volumes of verse, which have been completely overshadowed by his prose. Albert Pike (1809-1891) published in "Blackwood's," in 1839, his "Hymns to the Gods," which

gave promise of excellence not altogether fulfilled in his long and active career. His "Dixie," set to a popular air which has been traced back to slavery times in New York State, became, in a multitude of variations, a Southern Marsellaise. Philip Pendleton Cook (1816-1850), of Virginia, is remembered as the author of the little lyric "Florence Vane," so highly praised by Poe. In the Southern periodicals from 1849 to 1853 would occasionally appear lyrics under the *nom de plume* of "Aglaus," showing more than ordinary merit. These and others by the same writer were collected in book form and published in 1860. The longest of these poems was a metrical essay, entitled "Visions of Poetry," intended to illustrate the laws of verse. The volume was published at an inopportune time, and attracted little notice. There was sufficient in it, however, to show that a Southern poet had arisen to contest the laurels of Hayne. The author, Henry Timrod (1829-1867), like his friend and future editor and biographer, was a native of South Carolina. Even more than Hayne, he was the laureate of the Confederate cause. He gave us probably the best of the war lyrics written in the South. To him was allotted more than the common share of sorrow. As in the case of Poe, poetry with him was a passion, and for this passion he was ready to sacrifice any worldly advantage. His pleasant dreams were rudely shattered amid the din of arms, but he gave of his best to the cause he loved so well. Defeated, disappointed, and impoverished, he died of consumption two years after the war. Simms, Hayne, and Timrod strove to advance the cause of literature in their native State. Timrod was the first of the trio to go, and it was not until after his death that the South realized the rarity of the

genius it had lost. His works were published with appropriate eulogy by Hayne, in 1873. The chief value of these war lyrics is in the faithfulness with which they reflect the sectional feeling of the time. Like all occasional verses, they have little of permanent interest as poetry. The terms "tyrants," "invaders," "murderers," and "Huns" are flung at the defenders of the national cause with an iteration exceedingly wearisome to the reader of to-day. It is worth a remark that when his posthumous volume was published in New York and passed through several editions, it found a ready acceptance among the class of Huns, tyrants, and invaders so bitterly assailed.

The proportionate part borne by woman in the development of our literature is probably without historical precedent. The earliest New England poet of note was a woman. It was the prose and verse of another woman that inspired hope and courage in the breasts of the Revolutionary soldiers and statesmen, and to whom we are indebted for a faithful record of that struggle. Woman's influence in our later literature has long been one of the controlling forces. It was woman's minstrelsy that gave a local color to Western poetry. Alice Cary (1820-1870) and her sister Phœbe (1824-1871) were both born near Cincinnati, then one of the outskirts of the far West. The West had been celebrated in song before Alice was born, but she and her sister were the first of Western birth to give us verse of high quality. Their poetic ventures were first printed in local newspapers, but soon reached the hearts of the people throughout the land. In 1850, at Philadelphia, the sisters published their poems together in one volume, and shortly after removed to New York, where they supported themselves by literature. Their city

home became the resort of many of the most cultured men and women of the day.

The poetry of each is marked by a distinct individuality. Alice's song was tender, musical, and deep, with a touch of mysticism; Phœbe's was buoyant, hopeful, and vigorous. Alice's was tinged throughout with melancholy and thoughts of death; Phœbe's with the joys and hopes of life. Alice could startle with her depth of meaning, while Phœbe would descend to parodies. Poe praised Alice's "Pictures of Memory" with its opening lines, —

" Among the beautiful pictures  
That hang on Memory's wall,  
Is one of a dim old forest,  
That seemeth best of all,"

as one of the most perfect lyrics in the English language. This was perhaps only another instance of that critic's indiscriminate use of the superlative in treating of female poets. Yet no one can read Alice's earlier lyrics without noting a kinship of genius. Her "Lily Lee," "Ulalie," and "The Spirit Haunted" suggest Poe at once. Much better, because thoroughly her own, are such simple lyrics as "Helva," "Longings," "Nobility," and "The Farmer's Daughter."

A vastly improved standard was a noted feature of our literary growth during the middle years of the century. One of the potent forces to this end was the improved character of our magazines. The public appetite that had become jaded from a long period of mediocrity could now find relief when editorial articles could be looked for each month from a Mitchell, a Curtis, or a Lowell. Besides the Cary sisters, a number of writers sprang into notice from the high quality of their contributions to the leading monthlies. As

fairly representing the best of this important class, may be selected Mrs. Rose Terry Cooke (1827-1892). Bred under strictest Puritan discipline, taught to read before she was three, to study and learn columns of Walker's Dictionary at five, and to keep a diary at six, debarred the childish pleasures commonly allowed to those of her age, her pent-up feelings burst forth in song, whose burden naturally was a tender melancholy. No one has more pitilessly portrayed in prose the hardness and narrowness of a certain phase of New England life. Her lyrics are remarkable for their natural music, and as a ballad writer she is not surpassed by any of our female poets. A singer who could give uniformly good work in such varying keys as "Two Villages," "En Espagne," "Blue Beard's Closet," "A Story," "Once Before" and "Penna's Daughter," has earned her right to a place not far from the elect.

Dr. Holmes' famous aphorism, that nothing lasts like a coin or a lyric, is true of works by writers far less celebrated than the one to whom it was originally applied. There is a certain class of poems, which, for felicity of expression rather than depth of thought go straight to the heart. The world has taken them up, and they pass current without much regard to intrinsic value. If Theodore O'Hara (1820-1867), the Kentucky patriot, wrote anything of merit besides "The Bivouac of the Dead," the world at large has forgotten it. William H. Lytle (1826-1863) owes his poetic fame exclusively to verses written in 1857, beginning, —

"I am dying, Egypt, dying;  
Ebbs the crimson life-tide fast."

Of the "Poems of Many Moods," by Cornelius G. Fenner (1822-1847), "Gulf-Weed" alone drifts above

the sea of oblivion. The ambitious tragedy of "Velasco," by Epes Sargent (1813-1880), at this day interests nobody, but his songs of the sea are still read, and nearly every one has sung or recited his —

"A life on the ocean wave,  
A home on the roaring deep;  
Where the scattered waters rave,  
And the winds their revels keep."

Although Mrs. Julia Ward Howe has written many beautiful poems, her "Battle Hymn" alone has retained a hold upon the people. Coates Kinney is known to the general public by a single lyric, while his more meritorious work is ignored. Two ballads of Albert Greene (1802-1868) have survived whole libraries of patriotic epics and classic tragedies written within the last half-century.

The bulk of American verse is naturally lyrical. All of our best poets have written beautiful lyrics, but, with the exception of Poe, they have shown equal or greater power in some other branch of song. For the lyrical poets mentioned in this chapter, the sifting processes of time have already begun. The reverse of Dr. Holmes' dictum is also true. If nothing lasts like a lyric, nothing is so short-lived. A survey of the field cumbered with names that were "household words" a generation ago, now remembered only by the literary student or antiquarian, shows the mutability of this class of literature. Poe's fame, indeed, is assured, being brighter now than at his death half a century ago. It is doubtful if a majority of the minor poets considered in this chapter will be long remembered otherwise than as "single-poem writers." These served their purpose while they lasted. It is no reproach that they have not all earned a place among the



immortals. The song-birds of summer are none the less to be enjoyed for being the voices of a single season. While, therefore, we watch the shadows of oblivion steadily creeping over many a once treasured name, it is sufficient that these minor singers in their day fulfilled a purpose in making the world wiser and brighter for their presence.

## CHAPTER XII

### *HUMOR AND SATIRE*

1836-1870

THERE has never been an absolute dearth of humor in American literature. The most sombre periods have been enlivened with occasional flashes of wit and even levity. As early as 1646, Nathaniel Ward published his mirth-provoking work, "The Simple Cobler of Agawam." The ponderous pleasantries of Cotton Mather, Nicholas Noyes, and others of that primitive period, fairly rival the gigantic gambols of the leviathans of primeval ages. But it is chiefly the unintentional humor of some of these divines that is the most refreshing. In 1702 Cotton Mather furnished his labored argument proving that his own city of Boston was the object of Heaven's special regard. The great theologian evidently considered that he had reached the acme of praise and adoration in addressing the Creator as the "keeper of Boston, who neither slumbers nor sleeps." Compared with such manifestation of local pride, Dr. Holmes' famous aphorism concerning the "hub of the solar system," is the sublimation of modesty. Byles and Green, among the last of the Puritan poets, left us some tiresome parodies and satires, greatly admired in their day. An improvement is noted in the stimulus given to thought by the revolutionary era. All things considered, "McFingal" was not an unworthy precursor of "The Biglow Papers."

But for posterity to derive anything like serene pleasure from these works is quite out of the question.

The now almost forgotten Thomas Green Fessenden (1771-1837) gave some promise of excellence. While still a student at Dartmouth, he struck out from conventional routines and ventured to write a poem dealing in home subjects. His "Country Lovers" was an original creation. The "Yankee Jonathan's Courtship" clearly anticipated Lowell's idyl of "Zekle and Huldý." The political and other satires of Fessenden soon passed from the public mind, and their author outlived his fame. These works are devoid of literary merit, and are interesting only to the political student of those times. Though a lawyer by education, and a rhymester by choice, Fessenden rendered his best services through his intelligent interest in agriculture. He would persist, however, in writing verses. Besides directing his diatribes at political opponents, he took occasion, from personal motives, to satirize the doctors. His "Terrible Tractoration" (1803) was even more unmerciful than Dr. Holmes' "Rip Van Winkle, M.D.," in scoring the unprogressive members of the medical profession. His "Pills, Poetical, Political, and Philosophical" (to quote only a portion of the long and stupidly alliterative title) was published in 1809, the year that Dr. Holmes was born. Though in a measure Fessenden anticipated both Holmes and Lowell, to compare his vaporings with the scintillations of these later poets would be an absurdity. What poetic talent he possessed he deliberately sacrificed in the cause of the fleeting passions of the time. He has left us no substantial monument of his genius. Yet in his generation he was widely read, loved, and hated. He was among the first American poets to win

the approval of English critics. He set the pace for later writers of more enduring fame, and his humorous writings have a decidedly local, if not national tone.

The first permanent contributions to American wit and humor may be said to date with Irving and the Knickerbocker writers. "The Croakers," especially Halleck, did some good work. But our rarest examples of poetic wit were furnished by the two Harvard professors, who, though personally so dissimilar, seem destined to have their names inseparably associated. Holmes and Lowell, as wits — using that term in its true Shakspearean sense — are unsurpassed among contemporary writers of English verse. It has been their province to say wise things in an entertaining way. It is their subtle wisdom that exalts them above the plane of mere humorists. Something more than mirth is stimulated by their brightest sayings. Social and political humbugs, invulnerable against argument, have succumbed to the keen shafts of their ridicule and scorn.

The elder of these, Oliver Wendell Holmes (1809-1894), confined his labors chiefly to matters relating to literature or to his own profession. Beyond an occasional lyric or address, he manifested in public little interest in the stirring questions of the day. The radicalism of his relative, Wendell Phillips, was abhorrent to his nature and he openly declared his preference for "the man that inherits family traditions and the cumulative humanities of at least four or five generations." This expressed liking for elegance and refinement, so characteristic of most of his lighter verse, has been absurdly attributed to snobbishness, though no one could be further removed from the typical snob. The tributes to Lincoln and Burns have the

ring of true Americanism, and some of our finest war lyrics are from the autocrat's pen. "The Sweet Little Man," dedicated to the "Stay-at-Home Rangers," written at the outbreak of the war, is a bitter little satire that stung many a timid doubter to action. It seems strange that the author of the perhaps over-rhetorical address, "The Inevitable Trial," should be called an American Tory. He refused to take either his patriotism or his religious faith at second hand. The maxims of authority had little influence upon his own notions of Americanism or orthodoxy. In some respects he was as intensely American as Emerson himself. He had no language too bitter to express his contempt for the religion of formalism that remains deaf and blind to the teachings of nature and science.

In brief, his religion, which he never sought to conceal, seemed to be that of his heroine, who "never saw a church door so narrow she could n't go in through it, nor so wide that all the Creator's goodness and glory could enter it."

So frankly has Dr. Holmes declared himself in his writings that there is no excuse for his being misinterpreted by his reader or critic. His egotism is refreshing in its candor. His freely expressed opinions, his personal reminiscences, his grotesque views of life, and his heterodoxy seem sufficient to justify an English writer in designating him as "The American Montaigne."

It has been Dr. Holmes' good or bad fortune to be our greatest "occasional" poet. The sparkle of post-prandial verse must, in the nature of things, soon become dim and lifeless. The personality of even a great poet is insufficient to preserve the lustre of these pleasing trifles. The same may be said of merely comic poetry. There is something more than the comic, however, in

Dr. Holmes' humorous pieces. His "Evening, by a Tailor," absurdly burlesque as it is, served a purpose in holding up to ridicule a style of literary haberdashery so prevalent among our earlier writers. Lowell, in criticising a passage in Pope, wittily says that it suggests "Nature under the hands of a lady's maid." Our own literature offers a choice variety of figures drawn from the dressing-room. Thus Mrs. Sigourney apostrophizes Niagara, —

"Flow on forever in thy glorious robe."

Rufus Dawes grandiloquently describes how —

"The clouds have put their gorgeous livery on  
Attendant on the day."

And reference may be made to McDonald Clark's oft-quoted lines, —

"Now twilight lets her curtain down  
And pins it with a star."

The robe of the sky, the skirts of the clouds, the curtains of the dark, and similar tropes have been paraded in verse until worn shabby and threadbare. Jaded indeed must be the bard that would resort to them after Dr. Holmes' drastic treatment:

"Day hath put on his jacket, and around  
His burning bosom buttoned it with stars.  
Here will I lay me on the velvet grass,  
That is like padding to earth's meagre ribs.  
And hold communion with the things about me.  
Ah, me, how lovely is the golden braid  
That binds the skirt of night's descending robe!  
The thin leaves, quivering on their silken threads,  
Do make a music like to rustling satin,  
As the light breezes smooth their downy nap."

The poem of which these lines are the prelude, is one of its author's earliest, but it is doubtful if anything

more clever can be found in all his humorous verse. The period to which this poem belongs was that of the early periodical, *The New England Magazine* (1831-35). Only nine volumes were published, but they are of unusual interest to the literary student. There are a number of contributions in prose and verse signed with the now familiar initials O. W. H. In the number for September, 1831, appeared Holmes' "To an Insect." Two months later came the first of two papers entitled "The Autocrat of the Breakfast Table." These papers have since been disowned by their author, with the expressed hope that they should never be reprinted. A writer's wishes in such matters should be respected, and we forbear further comment except to note that the germs of a classic that has entertained three generations of readers are not at all so unworthy the matured product as has been assumed. In the same number with the opening chapter of "The Autocrat" may be found the first publication of "My Maiden Aunt." Other familiar lyrics, "The Comet" and "The Dilemma," and one not so familiar, "The Destroyers," appeared later.

Many of the poems contributed by Holmes to college and other periodicals were collected and published in book-form in 1836. When we consider the character of most of our lighter verse at that time, we can appreciate the effect of such work. The longest poem in the volume was the metrical essay on "Poetry," the first of his "occasional" pieces, fresh from its delivery before the Harvard Phi Beta Kappa. Here, too, were "The Last Leaf," which Lincoln found so "inexpressibly touching," and which loses none of its freshness with the lapse of years; "The Cambridge Churchyard," originally a part of his "Metrical Essay;" and "The Height of the Ridiculous." It would not be surprising

if "The Last Leaf" should gain additional significance in outlasting, in the popular mind, all the rest of his verse. In his lyric on the katydid, the sly fun that he loves to poke at respectable dulness again broke out:

"Thou mindest me of gentle folks,  
Old gentle folks are they,  
Thou sayst an undisputed thing  
In such a solemn way."

His thrusts were delivered with such ineffable good-humor that no one could resent them. It is doubtful if at that time any other American poet could have so touched the weak spots of his countrymen without losing his popularity. We had not yet outgrown our provincial sensitiveness, and were loath to accept criticism upon cherished idols. Holmes found occasion, however, to ridicule some of our national foibles, but in such a charming manner as at once to enlist the reader's sympathy.

One of the most admirable traits of our poet is the candor with which he acknowledges his own mistakes. In the preface to a new edition of "The Autocrat," in 1882, he says:

"We have all of us, writers and readers, drifted away from many of our former habits, tastes, and perhaps beliefs."

The anti-slavery struggle elicited little sympathy from him, yet at the culmination of that struggle there was, as we have seen, no uncertainty as to his position. He ridiculed the "Transcendental movement," but lived to acknowledge its significance. In 1843, during the days of Brook Farm and "The Dial," he wrote for the Harvard Phi Beta Kappa his "After Dinner Poem," in which he goes out of his way to cast his slurs at the idealists:



"On every leaf the 'earnest' sage may scan,  
Portentous bore! their 'many-sided' man —  
A weak eclectic, groping vague and dim,  
Whose every angle is a half-starved whim,  
Blind as a mole and curious as a lynx,  
Who rides a beetle which he calls a 'Sphinx.'  
And O what questions asked in club-foot rhyme  
Of Earth, the tongueless and the deaf-mute Time!  
Here babbling 'Insight' shouts in Nature's ears  
His last conundrum on the orbs and spheres;  
There self-inspection sucks its little thumb,  
With 'Whence am I?' and 'Wherefore did I come?'"

Half a century later Holmes had so far drifted away from his former tastes and beliefs as to write of the author of the "club-foot rhymes" of "The Sphinx,"

"Where in the realm of thought, whose air is song,  
Does he, the Buddha of the West, belong?  
He seems a winged Franklin, sweetly wise,  
Born to unlock the secret of the skies;  
And which the nobler calling — if 't is fair  
Terrestrial with celestial to compare —  
To guide the storm-cloud's elemental flame,  
Or walk the chambers whence the lightning came  
Amidst the sources of its subtle fire  
And steal their effluence for his lips and lyre?"

Like Molière, Holmes took his own property, no matter in whose hands he found it, even if in the possession of writers so diverse as Jonathan Swift and John Quincy Adams. They were his own materials that he found, and he made right royal use of them. He was the social, as Emerson was the intellectual reactionist against the puritan asceticism of their forefathers. He delighted in warmth and light and geniality. He believed in throwing open the windows of the soul and making the spiritual "living temple" radiant with the rays of truth and beauty. His songs were, therefore, of the sunshine — of the sunshine that some-

times scorched, as when he satirized "The Moral Bully" — but oftener inspired cheer, hope, and good-will.

If it be true that "a good wit will make use of anything; it will turn diseases to a commodity," the wit of Dr. Holmes is among the best. For if it has not turned moral and physical diseases to a "commodity" it has at least done a great deal toward counteracting their effects. "Be cheerful" is one of his prescriptions for inducing longevity. This cheerful nature of his poetry and philosophy has lulled to serenity many a careworn spirit and made easier and lighter many of the burdens of life. There are plenty of latter-day philosophers to tell us of our faults and short-comings and to denounce the sordid and self-seeking tendencies of the time. It is a relief to turn to the works of this genial writer, who, while venerating what is good in the past, was still in full accord with his own age. The Doctor would have been justified by truth, even at the expense of modesty and rhyme, if he had inserted in the place of the English poet's his own name when he wrote:

" Good to the heels the well-worn slipper feels  
When the tired player shuffles off his buskin;  
A page of Hood may do a fellow good  
After a scolding from Carlyle or Ruskin."

To say that no humorous poet ever produced uniformly good work is to state a truism applicable to all writers of verse. But it is equally true that few writers of his century have done well so much work of the kind as that which has endeared the "Autocrat" to all classes of readers. Many of his puns are outrageous, and subject to all the strictures which he himself makes against verbicide in literature. Such pieces as "The September Gale," "The Ballad of the Oyster-man," and "The Spectre Pig" are the merest kind of trifles

and could easily be spared. But "The Deacon's Master Piece," "Parson Turell's Legacy," and "Latter-day Warnings" are wholesome examples of clear-grained, Yankee humor. Because he appreciated humor at its true worth, Holmes never allowed it to degenerate into buffoonery.

"If the sense of the ridiculous," he remarks, "is one side of an impressible nature, it is very well; but if that is all there is in a man, he had better have been an ape, and stood at the head of his profession at once." And we can honestly believe his early assertion,—

"I never dare to write  
As funny as I can."

It is not only his humor or pathos that has gained for Holmes an international reputation. His wisdom and his wit were deep enough to leave a permanent impression upon the literature of the English language. To his association of the names of Franklin and Emerson must now be added his own. Franklin, Emerson, and Holmes, each a philosopher in his way, form a trinity of American writers and thinkers, thoroughly national and representative. In some respects Holmes is the most attractive of the three. His precepts are equally free from the candle-end parsimony which marked the philosophy of one, and the extravagance of statement which occasionally marred the idealism of the other. One source of his great influence was his ability to express homely truths in terms of rare grace and beauty. He was never at a loss for a fling at upstarts and pretenders, but hoary tradition appealed to him in vain, if at the expense of truth and manliness. Toward all who honestly and earnestly sought his counsel, he was the kindest and most considerate of men. To him

nature was full of beauty, light, and cheer, and he sought to impress those qualities upon all his philosophy in prose and verse. His message to mankind was one of hope, courage, and good-will.

In the eventide of his days, when the Autocrat of the Breakfast Table had developed into the Dictator over the Teacups, the poet complained that he found the burdens and restrictions of rhyme "more and more troublesome" as he grew older. Yet he never wrote a tenderer tribute in verse than that composed in his eighty-fifth year to the memory of the historian, Francis Parkman. And certainly no poet but Holmes, and Holmes at his best, could metamorphose the trolley electric car into a broomstick train, suggesting the return of the witches to their old New England haunts.

Holmes was the earliest of our humorous poets who wrote anything fit to live. Striving to be true rather than consistent, he has succeeded in giving us one of the few original creations of his time. If his breakfast-table talks fall short of the platonic symposium in formulating a system of philosophy, they have at any rate enlivened, cheered, and instructed three generations of readers. He has relieved our national reputation of much of its undue seriousness and infused a lighter, sunnier spirit into our literature. To have accomplished this, even if he had done nothing else, would entitle him to a high place among the world's benefactors.

The Autocrat apparently had no thought of his own career when he said: "If I were giving advice to a young fellow of talent, with two or three facets to his mind, I would tell him by all means to keep his wits in the background until after he had made a reputation by his more solid qualities." As applied to his brother

humorist, the remark was suggestive. It was upon his "more solid qualities" that Lowell's earlier reputation was based, though his lasting fame may rest mainly on his humorous and satiric verse. The long narrative poem of his early manhood, "A Legend of Brittany," is not the kind to be a favorite with posterity. "The Vision of Sir Launfal" is a beautiful poem, and deservedly the most popular of its author's more serious efforts, but there is not sufficient originality in it to sustain the reputation of a modern poet. Conceding the merits of the "Commemoration Ode" and "The Cathedral," it must be admitted that other poets have excelled these in similar productions. It is in his satires that Lowell's creative genius shines the brightest. Herein he at once placed himself abreast of great poets. This is a sweeping statement, but justified by facts.

Satire properly directed is and always has been one of the functions of poetry, and never has it attained a higher standard than in "The Biglow Papers." Wit, poetry, sentiment, an exalted ideal of Americanism and a contempt of truckling expediency, the love of truth and scorn of hypocrisy, mark the individuality of these papers.

James Russell Lowell (1819-1891) was born at Cambridge, and died at his ancestral home at Elmwood, after a lifelong residence in Massachusetts. His career at Harvard was not remarkable for scholarship, and when his class graduated in 1838, the young poet and future professor was under a cloud. His "Class Poem" was printed but not delivered, its author being still "in exile." In this, his first important effort, never included in his "complete works," the abolitionists and transcendentalists were both held up to ridi-

cule. Within a few years its author was to be a foremost anti-slavery writer, as well as one of the most devoted of Mr. Emerson's admirers. On the first of August, 1842, the anniversary of West Indian emancipation, his poem, "Stanzas to Freedom," was sung at Dedham, Massachusetts. The poet had chosen to cast in his lot with the few, declaring, —

"They are slaves that dare not be  
In the right with two or three."

Lowell's abolition poetry differed essentially from that of Whittier. The latter appealed to the moral sense of the masses, Lowell to the intellectual sense of the cultured. Both were enthusiasts. Longfellow made a few passes with his Damascus blade, simply to announce his convictions, then sheathed his sword and devoted himself to themes of home and peace. Lowell and Whittier slept on their arms, ready to spring to action at the first call of duty. In December, 1844, Lowell threw down the gauntlet and challenged the apologists of slavery in the greatest lyric inspired by the anti-slavery agitation. The resounding rhythm of "The Present Crisis" went ringing through the land, sending the blood tingling through men's veins, startling the torpid conscience of the country, and appealing to all the nobler instincts of humanity. It was one of the premonitory warnings of the approaching upheaval, which many were just beginning to foresee.

But all of Lowell's and Whittier's verses and Garrison's and Phillips's speeches had little effect upon the politicians at Washington. In 1846 war, so unjust in its origin, yet so far-reaching in its results, was declared with Mexico. In May was fought the battle of

Palo Alto, and soon after, the call for volunteers was issued. One response to this call appeared in the Boston "Courier." It was in the shape of a letter dated, "Jaylem, June, 1846," enclosing a poem written by "Hosea Biglow" on the subject of the recruiting. It was the voice of the rural North, not yet lulled to silence by the commercial plea of expediency, that spoke through those twenty stanzas of sarcasm and denunciation.

Never before in our history was witnessed such a literary revolution as was created by "The Biglow Papers." The arguments of satire and mockery, which had so long been employed against the reformers, was turned with telling force against their aspersers. Well directed ridicule is always a keen weapon, but never more effective than when turned against vice and truculency. The political cant of the day masquerading under the allusions to "manifest destiny," "the extension of freedom's area," and other euphemisms in defence of an unjust war, were exposed in all their contemptible weakness. "Hosea Biglow" leaped into fame at once, and many were the speculations as to his identity. He was the impersonation of the honest, homespun sentiment of the plain, common people. That he reflected the opinions of the masses in the free states was shown by his instant popularity. The dialect form of the verse only increased the verisimilitude.

American dialect verse was by no means original with Lowell, but it reached its highest degree of perfection in his satiric verse. He was the first of our writers who raised it to the dignity of true poetry. His intuitive perception of the Yankee character of half a century ago enabled him to interpret that character truly and appreciatively. Hosea himself is but a

reproduction of the "up-country man" such as Mr. Lowell had often seen at anti-slavery meetings,— "capable of district-school English, but always instinctively falling back into the natural stronghold of his homely dialect when heated to the point of self-forgetfulness." With Americans of that class the phraseology of the Bible was familiar from infancy, and the homely directness of their speech on sacred subjects is totally distinct from anything like irreverence.

It was the profound tone of Puritan idealism, of devotion to moral principle, regardless of any claims of expediency, that underlay the cutting irony, and made these taunts and flings sting like lashes of the Eumenides. Serious poetry, like that of Pierpont, Whittier, and earlier lyrics of Lowell himself, might elicit admiration, but made few converts. But here was a champion who made scorners and scoffers themselves the butt of scorn and scoffing. Even the politicians could not fail to appreciate the change in the situation. The art of these effusions was beginning to tell with the voters. Freedom was becoming popular. Northern doughfaces brought round with a sharp turn began to realize the absurdity of their frantic effort to face "south by north." The revulsion in public feeling is shown by the enormous sale of the work after its publication in book form in 1848. It was read even by its enemies, found its way across the sea, was quoted in Parliament, and illustrated by Cruikshank. It forced itself into channels formerly inaccessible to anti-slavery literature, and prepared the public mind in this country for the reception of Mrs. Stowe's still more popular, but artistically less praiseworthy, work four years later.

There are but nine of these "papers" inspired by events connected with the Mexican war and written at



intervals during the two years of that contest. For a right understanding of the issues involved, as regarded from the anti-slavery point of view, these poems of wit and sarcasm answer all the purposes of an elaborate history. They are contemporary chronicles composed by one of the shrewdest and wisest men of his time. The creatures of the poet's brain are silhouetted upon his page not more strongly than the few historic persons, whose imaginary but typical sayings have become so unpleasantly notorious.

Lowell has given no evidence of possessing the faculty for story writing that characterizes his brother satirist. Such prose fictions as "Elsie Venner" or "The Guardian Angel" would have been impossible to him. Yet in the annals of fiction there is no better delineated character than Parson Wilbur. His personality is much more distinct than that of Hosea himself. The simple-hearted, patriotic, garrulous, and harmlessly egotistic old man captivates us at once. Even his pedantry becomes charming in its quaint, old-fashioned form of speech. We can forgive his tendency to break out in Greek and Latin quotations. The unconscious humor that sometimes surprises us in the otherwise repellent writings of the early Puritan divines has become a fixed trait in this their nineteenth century representative.

Shortly after the breaking out of the Civil War, Mr. Lowell reintroduced his old acquaintances, Wilbur, Biglow, and Sawin. In this second series, the farcical, mocking tone of the first is subdued by the gravity of the situation to almost the intensity of tragedy. There is less of mirth and irony, but more of poetry and deep feeling. Lowell's patriotism was inflamed by the hostile attitude of England and her foremost advisers, like

Gladstone and Earl Russell, and his bitterness found unrestrained expression. The astonishment expressed by English critics at Mr. Lowell's betrayal of any resentment at the course of the mother country in our hours of trial is surpassed only by that of the English holders of Confederate bonds at the refusal of the United States government to reimburse them for their unfortunate investment. When the asperities of the war had moderated, the South had no sincerer well-wisher in the North, and old England no truer friend in New England, than the author of "The Biglow Papers."

The sincere regret with which the reader learns of the death of Mr. Wilbur is in itself a tribute to the good man's memory. The parson's "disease," as Hosea calls it, occurred on Christmas Day, 1862. "The Biglow Papers" without Wilbur's guiding hand would be an incongruity, and we hear nothing more from Hosea until the dawn of peace, when Mr. Lowell himself, speaking through his hero, gives utterance to the highest strain that he anywhere attains in his verse.

For nineteen years our pastoral singer had been a close watcher of men and events. He had received vituperation as well as encouragement, but through all remained true to the ideal of his youth. From the recruiting of the first Massachusetts regiment in 1846, in what he considered an unjust cause to the downfall of Richmond in 1865, he had scathingly ridiculed and denounced a democracy controlled by slavery, a theocracy that defended the degradation of men and women, and a social aristocracy North and South that ostracized people for exercising the right of free speech. When the long struggle was ended, the minstrel could confront the outlook with feelings of sincere and solemn gratitude rather than in a spirit of exultation. As he

looks back and thinks of the terrible cost in life on both sides, the years of sacrifice and anguish through which the result was accomplished, with profound conviction of the fearful meaning of it all, he pours forth his soul in that remarkable pæan which with so much repressed feeling chants the victory of the national cause. It is the sentiment of the whole grief-stricken people in their hour of dearly bought triumph that finds expression through the poet whose own losses in the war have intensified his sympathies with the broken homes throughout the South as well as the North.

Here properly ends the series, though one more paper is added purporting to be a speech on reconstruction delivered by Hosea a year afterward.

The Yankee pastoral, "The Courtin'," originally written to fill a blank page, and which has undergone three versions, each an improvement on its predecessor, is a pretty picture, appealing to universal sentiment. It has no connection whatever with "The Biglow Papers" with which it is printed, and is, as already stated, but a more refined and poetic rendition of an earlier verse-writer's description of a Yankee courtship.

"The Biglow Papers" are probably the only American political poems of any length destined to endure. Though the events, real and imaginary, which they recount are transient, the wit, philosophy, and poetry are perennial, and will in themselves keep alive in the popular mind certain episodes that would otherwise be preserved only in the memory of the historical student.

The middle years of the century (1845-1865) were the most productive in American poetry, but American criticism was still crude. Aspiring mediocrity, finding itself quietly thrust aside by works of merit, retaliated and sought reprisal by attacking successful rivals.

This, as well as the superficiality of current criticism, as indicated by the anthologies of the period, naturally exasperated writers like Lowell and Poe possessing genuine talent. The former, in echoing Coleridge as well as anticipating Disraeli, bitterly exclaims, —

“Nature fits all her children with something to do,  
He who would write and can't write can surely review.”

As literature, “A Fable for Critics” (1848), from which the above couplet is quoted, is not to be compared with “The Biglow Papers.” Judging by to-day's estimate, Mr. Lowell fairly well anticipated the verdict of posterity. Possibly he underestimated Bryant, Poe, and himself, as he certainly overrated the importance of Neal, Briggs, and Judd. His strictures on Dana, Cooper, Halleck, and Willis were eminently just, as were his tributes to Emerson, Longfellow, Hawthorne, Whittier, and Irving. That such a production was needed, any careful student of our literature must admit. Poe was lashing himself into a fury over the shallow pretenders that were posing as poets, romancers, and critics. As in the political contest, wit and satire proved better weapons than preaching and denunciation. The “Fable” was far more effective in exposing the American Scotts, Bulwers, and Disraelis, “in short, the American everything elses,” than all the acrid attacks of Poe on the “literati.”

In “The Unhappy Lot of Mr. Knott” and “An Oriental Apologue,” our author's rollicking humor again asserts itself. In these the follies of “spiritualists” and whims of theological pietists are assailed. There is not much poetry in either of them, but each is brimful of humor, puns, good and wretched, old and new, ingenious rhymes and witty nonsense.

"I, on occasion, too, could preach, but hold it wiser far  
To give the public sermons it will take with its cigar,"

he says in a poem of which only "fragments" have been printed. He was never very solicitous to observe "the distinction 'twixt singing and preaching." But though his song might turn out a sermon, it was not the kind "to turn delight into a sacrifice."

Because Lowell was such a downright, upright American, he resented with indignation all attacks upon the honor of his country, more especially when such attacks were insidious forms of political corruption or vicious legislation. In his later years he caricatured in his verse ring politics, dishonest financiering, and literary piracy, as vigorously, if not at such length, as he had assailed slavery and its attendant evils. These attacks were not so much satirical poems as centre shots in the shape of isolated epigrams, or bitter reflections injected into his serious verse, as his suggestions concerning speculation and peculation, his motto for the American Copyright League, his reference to the office-holder who interprets doing good by stealth to mean doing good by stealing, and his characterization of the political "boss," —

"Skilled to pull wires, he baffled Nature's hope,  
Who sure intended him to stretch a rope."

Yet, in spite of the public scandals for which the eighth decade of the century was especially notorious, he never lost faith in the land of his birth and of his love. His addresses in England, while minister, show that his devotion was not dimmed by advancing years. And though in a moment of bitter mirth he satirized the land of his nativity as "the land of broken promise," in a calmer mood he changed the phrase to "land

of Honest Abraham." Massachusetts had no more loyal son than he, and he never wearied of singing her praises, though he never could delude himself into admiring the New England spring. To him —

"May is a pious fraud of the almanac,  
A ghastly parody of real spring  
Shaped out of snow and breathed with eastern wind,"

too apt to produce what he calls —

" . . . a dank and snuffling day  
That made us bitter at our neighbor's sins,"

and he makes his hero refer to the hard, unattractive experience of

"New England youth, that seems a sort of pill,  
Half wish-I-dared, half Edwards on the Will,  
Bitter to swallow, and which leaves a trace  
Of Calvinistic colic on the face."

Perhaps the most conspicuous trait that pervades Mr. Lowell's poetry is its thoroughly manly tone. No desire for temporary popularity or mere applause as such, seems to influence him in the least. His standard is high, but not beyond reach. "No man can produce great things who is not thoroughly sincere in dealing with himself," he says in his essay on Rousseau. It is this absolute sincerity that stamps his own works and captivates the reader. We feel that it is the voice of a strong, courageous man speaking through the lines. Even the acknowledged harshness of some of his verse is due to the subordination of melody to strength. Not that he strikes the chords "rudely and hard," for they seem to vibrate only to a master hand. Energy more than elegance is his characteristic.

The defects of Mr. Lowell's style need not concern us much. They consist chiefly, it may be assumed, in

some cacophonious lines, which a slight revision would have remedied, occasionally confused metaphors, a self-confessed tendency to sermonize, and, more particularly in his prose, certain errors of taste, slovenly expressions, and carelessly formed sentences. These may be left to those critics who judge chiefly by faults. As our acknowledged foremost man of letters, he has raised the standard of Americanism, has advocated a loftier and more rational patriotism, has made political chicanery contemptible and ridiculous, and in his own career has shown that high intellectual attainments are not inconsistent with a lively interest in current political affairs. By his personality he dignified American citizenship abroad, and established more cordial relations between the two English-speaking nations. If not absolutely great as an original or imaginative writer, he has honestly earned the distinction of being the greatest satiric poet in the English language since the days of Pope.

Lowell was no politician, though there is a great deal of politics in his poetry. John G. Saxe (1816-1887), on the other hand, was a skilful politician, though there is very little politics in his verse. America has produced so few writers of polished satirical poetry that it is something of regret that we note the vanishing fame of the last-named writer, whose works were once so generally popular.

Saxe was a native of Vermont and graduated at Middlebury college in the class of 1839. For years he held a leading place as journalist, politician, lecturer, wit, post-prandial poet and general humorist. His literary career began in 1841, when, while yet a struggling young attorney, he published in "The Knickerbocker Magazine" his ballad, "The Briefless Barrister."

This was soon followed by his still more popular "Rhyme of the Rail." These two clever lyrics, if none of his others, are likely to survive and preserve the name of Saxe among our humorous poets.

In 1846 Saxe delivered a poem before his college on the somewhat familiar subject of "Progress." The degeneracy of their own times has been a favorite with poets from the days of Job, and it cannot be said that Saxe, in his praise of times past, has added anything new or important. Yet it was one of the most successful poems of the generation. It furnished numerous lines for quotation and at once placed the author in the front rank of American satirists of the day. To-day it reads like a thousand and one similar utterances, with its conventional style, its trite epithets and tiresome platitudes. Its chief merit is in certain well turned couplets more remarkable for polish than depth. "The Money King," another satiric poem, is a counterpart of "Progress," as hackneyed in theme and execution, as graceful and correct in diction, and as superficial in thought.

The immediate popularity of his first satires spurred the author to new efforts. His writings were always in demand. During one period of his life, each year witnessed the production of a new and rather long humorous poem. While occupied with the varied pursuits of his active career, he still found time to write a multitude of lyrics, ballads, sonnets, translations, travesties, and legendary verses.

In his after-dinner poem, recited before the Psi Upsilon fraternity in New York in 1874, he regards the encroachment of age in a spirit of good-natured banter, suggestive of many of Dr. Holmes' "reunion" verses. This poem, bubbling over with fun and good



spirits, comes as the last message from the genial singer to congenial friends. One couplet is especially significant, —

“Is he old who owes nothing to fraudulent art?  
Above all is he old who is young at the heart?”

For alas! “the same scourge whips the joker and the enjoyer of the joke.” Not long after the delivery of these lines, Mr. Saxe, while on a lecturing tour in Virginia, was the victim of a serious railway accident. The shock to his nervous system was such that the resulting illness lasted the remaining thirteen years of his life. A series of afflictions seems to have entirely reversed his naturally cheerful and buoyant disposition. Shortly after his accident, his wife, so tenderly referred to in many of his poems, died and was followed in quick succession by their three daughters and eldest son. The poet’s mind weakened under the strain, and the “young in heart” suddenly became prematurely old in spirit, and was virtually dead to the rest of mankind. The once bright and sunny-natured man, who had done so much to lighten life’s burdens for others, became a recluse, the subject of a brooding melancholy, his personality almost forgotten by the great world outside that had so often laughed at his jokes and applauded his wit.

There was a time when Saxe might have disputed with Lowell and Holmes the leadership in American satire. That he has been so easily passed in the long run by these two, and by younger writers, is not at all surprising. The impression that he made upon our literature was but transient. He has left us no genuine masterpiece of literary art. As intimated, his verse is polished, clear-cut, and refined. But it is lacking in

originality, creative force, and imaginative power. He satirized social follies, but was always on the popular side. He never risked his popularity in attacking popular wrongs. He aimed to please, and that was all. His "occasional" poems challenge comparison with those of Dr. Holmes to their own disadvantage. While it would be manifestly unfair to contrast his "My Boyhood" with Hood's "I remember, I remember," we cannot see that his initial poem "The Poet's License" is any improvement upon "The Poet's Portion" of the English poet. His frank admission that "The Proud Miss MacBride" is "*(longo intervallo)*" after the manner of Hood's incomparable 'Golden Legend,' will hardly justify his repeated imitations of that poet's attitude toward literature and life. Of his longer poems, "Miss MacBride" alone is endowed with anything like longevity. Some of its satire is as applicable to-day as when first written, notably the merited flagellation of "American aristocracy:"

"Of all the notable things on earth,  
The queerest one is pride of birth,  
Among our 'fierce Democracie!'  
A bridge across a hundred years,  
Without a prop to save it from sneers,  
Not even a couple of rotten Peers  
A thing for laughter, fleers and jeers,  
Is American aristocracy."

Wherein Saxe most excels is his sharp turn of wit that compresses a satire within a single sentence. He is perhaps the brightest epigrammatist that we have produced. He has given us some excellent paraphrases from the epigrams of Martial, and some of his own are perfect. There are a number of these not included in his "complete works," but too good to be

lost in the columns of defunct magazines and forgotten journals. The legal profession has contributed largely to epigrammatic literature, but there are none better than Saxe's "On an Ill-Read Lawyer," "On a Famous Water Suit," and "Nemo Repente Turpissimus." It is not clear why the collection of epigrams at the end of his volume omits one of his best, — that suggested by the common-law rule prohibiting married women from making wills:

" Men, dying, make their wills, but wives  
Escape a work so sad ;  
Why should they make what all their lives  
The gentle dames have had ? "

In social life, Saxe is said to have been one of the wittiest of men. There are many traditions of his conversational humor, and brilliant repartees. That his personality was greater than his written words is manifest by the diminishing circle of his readers. Whether or not he cared for posthumous fame, he had his full share of contemporaneous applause.

The follies and extravagances of our fashionable city life offer a tempting field to the satirist. As a rule most of the attempts in that direction have been failures, marked chiefly by coarseness and an ignorance of the life attempted to be ridiculed. Saxe was only measurably successful in his flings at the vulgarities of certain "new rich." In the deeper touches of feeling his "Miss MacBride" falls short of the object attained by that other ballad of Gotham life, "Nothing to Wear." The author of the latter, Mr. William Allen Butler, was born in Albany in 1825, and graduated at the New York University in the class of 1843. While a young man he wrote a series of sketches called "The Colonel's Club," whose humor foreshadowed

something of the future satirist. In 1850 he published "Barnum's Parnassus," a satirical work purporting to contain selections from "leading American Poets," which has long been out of print. He has given us at least three satiric poems of real power. "Nothing to Wear," from its first publication in "Harpers' Magazine" in 1857, has had a remarkable career. It was complimented by a number of parodies, was plagiarized and stolen outright, and translated into at least two continental languages. Its title has added a popular expression to our language; and its heroine has taken her place among the recognized creations of standard fiction.

Yet in all the essentials of satiric verse, Butler's "Two Millions" and "General Average" outrank the more popular poem. The darker side of business life, such as must of necessity obtrude itself upon the notice of a successful city lawyer, is mercilessly depicted. In "Two Millions" the subject is the sordid, worldly minded millionaire, without an aspiration above his business, to whom public spirit and charitable instincts are strangers because they never put a dollar in his pocket ("and very seldom took a dollar out").

"General Average" has to do with a well known principle in the law of shipping and is descriptive of a contest between greed and treachery, — a case of fraud on both sides, —

"When truth stepped aside, and conscience withdrew,  
To leave a clear field for Yankee and Jew,"

in which the latter comes out second best.

The sum of Mr. Butler's satiric work is light. Others will doubtless go over the same field at greater length. As it is, he must be recognized as the ablest

satirist of metropolitan life and society that New York has yet produced.

It was in "The Atlantic Monthly" for November, 1857, that "The Autocrat of the Breakfast Table" made his bow to the public, and began that series of table talk that has edified and amused countless readers. In the corresponding number of "Harpers" Mr. Butler introduced his capricious heroine in her unhappy plight of possessing "nothing to wear," and in an early number of "Graham's Magazine" during the same year, a now notorious character made his debut at "Hans Breitmann's Barty." Whatever credit is due to an originator should be awarded to the creator of this bibulous Teuton. Charles Godfrey Leland was born in Philadelphia in 1824 and graduated at Princeton in the class of 1846. When Longfellow published his first volume of poems in 1839, some of Leland's verses had been already printed in the newspapers. One day, while editing "Graham's Magazine," there being space to fill, Mr. Leland, in a hurry, "knocked off 'Hans Breitmann's Barty.'" It was extensively copied and made its way across the ocean. "I little dreamed," writes Mr. Leland, "that in days to come I should be asked in Egypt and on the blue Mediterranean, and in every country in Europe, if I was its author." "I wrote in those days," he adds, "a vast number of such anonymous drolleries, many of them, I dare say, quite as good, in 'Graham's Magazine' and the 'Weekly Bulletin,' etc., but I took no heed of them. They were probably appropriated in due time by the authors of 'Beautiful Snow.'"

Much of Mr. Leland's serious verse, to use his own criticism, is a "wild mixture of cosmopolitanism and Hamletism." His other dialect poems fail to interest,

but these German-English ballads, interpretative of a phase of American life, were a new creation, though since their first appearance our literature has become infested with a heterogeneous brood of imitations, utterly devoid of the humor and satire of the original.

In his appearance as a roistering captain in the Union army several years after the "barty," Hans is hardly the ideal patriot or warrior, though he is said to have been drawn from life. "Breitmann's Going to Church" is probably the best of these war ballads, and is infused with genuine poetry. "Breitmann in Politics" is in the line of broad farce, but is easily among the best of our political burlesques.

Leland has imbibed deeply from the founts of German literature and philosophy. He can thoroughly sympathize with a most important class of our foreign-born citizens, whose conduct of life enables them, amid most untoward circumstances, still to "*enjoy*, when other men would probably despair." The best tribute to his success is the hearty appreciation of these ballads by "educated and intelligent Germans."

The author of "Hans Breitmann" has been so successful as a humorist that his readers seem loath to take him seriously, and have never given much attention to even such meritorious work as "Frangipani," "The Music Lesson of Confucius," and "The Fall of the Trees." His prose writings, it must be confessed, are frequently marred by strained efforts to be "funny," and by flippancies and extravagances that are neither wise nor witty.

For a so-called grave nation, the quantity of our humorous verse is remarkable, but the great mass of it is too ephemeral to deserve discussion. The social, political and esthetic conditions of American life offer

special temptations to a keen satirist. Political buncombe was appropriately handled by "Hosea Biglow," and in at least one instance properly lampooned by the author of "Hans Breitmann." Intellectual pretences have been ridiculed by Holmes, and social hypocrisies exposed by Saxe and Butler. Aside from the works of these writers, the bulk of American satire during the fifty years preceding the close of the Civil War was by disappointed authors in ridicule of successful rivals.

As early as 1820 Robert Waln (1794-1825), of Philadelphia, published his "American Bards," a satire. "Truth, a New Year's Gift for Scribblers" was written in 1832 by W. J. Snelling (1804-1848), whose Indian poem, "The Birth of Thunder," may still be found in the anthologies; Laughton Osborn (1809-1878), mentioned in a previous chapter, wrote, among other things, his "Vision of Rubeta" (1838), a tedious tirade against the public press, consisting of over thirty-two hundred lines, and which Poe declared to be the best American satire yet written. The "Quacks of Helicon" (1841), by L. A. Whitmer (1805-1863), was a bitter and indiscriminate denunciation of American verse-writers. Even its title would have been long since forgotten had it not been for the eulogistic notice by Edgar Poe. "The Poets and Poetry of America" (1847) was somewhat above the average. It was directed against Dr. Griswold's compilation, and a plausible argument has been written to prove it the work of Poe himself. The objection to all of these and similar productions is that the intended sarcasm is lost in the violence of invective. They all indicate a strained, self-conscious, imitative attitude fatal to that class of literature. Dr. Griswold may have been smarting under the sense of personal insult when he wrote "the disease of the satiric

muse in this country has been spleen." Yet, after making due allowances, his characterization was just. In pure burlesque, as distinguished from satire, we have not fared much better. Our comic poetry for the most part has not survived its first utterance.

Humor is aptly defined by Mr. Stedman as the "overflow of genius." It is possible that the pent-up forces of our national life have not yet had sufficient outlet. We are constantly informed that Americans do not understand the uses of recreation, that they take even their pleasures sadly. This is certainly not due to inability to appreciate humor, for Americans are proverbially inclined to look at the ludicrous side of things. Hence it is the more remarkable that during the most productive period of our literature humorous poets were so few in number. These few, however, have written sufficient to prove that there is such a thing as genuine humor in our poetry; sufficient to prove, too, that American humor is not necessarily to be associated with exaggeration, flippancy, and irreverence, and that refinement and a high order of excellence are conspicuous traits of our most representative satirists. Clownishness and vulgarity will continue to appeal with success as they have done for ages past, and will be read only to be forgotten. But purity and high purpose in humor, as anything good in letters, is bound to survive. Our humorous literature has suffered in common with the rest. The attempts to be truly American, resulting for the most part in bad spelling and oddness in expression, are now happily as obsolete as strained efforts in more serious branches. Bad English has long since ceased to be the essential badge of good Americanism. With Holmes and Lowell at the



head, and Saxe, Butler, and Leland following, besides others of a later period, not properly to be discussed in this chapter, it may be fairly claimed that our best humorous and satiric verse is a true reflex of our national character.

## CHAPTER XIII

### *IDEALISM AND REALISM*

1836-1870

THE second decade of the nineteenth century witnessed a remarkable awakening of spiritual energy in New England. The "liberal wing of the Congregationalists" had drifted into Unitarianism, and as early as 1815 the breach with orthodoxy was complete. But the revolt ceased not there. Unitarianism itself was destined to become too orthodox for the more advanced element. The intelligent study of foreign masters and thinkers was stirring the sluggish intellect of the country and giving an impetus to thought and conduct that sorely perplexed conservative and respectable dulness.

In philosophy, as in literature, we had not yet separated from the mother-country. In spite of Coleridge's labors in England, the principles of Locke and Bentham remained practically unquestioned among us. The intellect of Germany was the entering wedge that was to split American thought from its servile adherence to English models. American scholars, like Edward Everett, after long sojourns abroad, returned with the fruits of European culture. Longfellow was the first to infuse, to any appreciable extent, the German spirit into our poetry, as is manifest in his first volume of verse. Goethe, Kant, and Hegel were destined indi-

rectly to exert an influence upon American thought unprecedented outside of that hitherto exercised by the literature of England. It was due to this influence of German philosophy, as much as to any one cause, that American literature cut its leading strings and asserted its right to be.

About the same time that Edward Everett returned from Germany (1820), Dr. Channing was bringing his eloquence to bear in uprooting established prejudices and revivifying the moribund theology of the day. It was the renaissance of conscience from a long period of sloth and inanity. Out of all the conflicting forces of the time there emerged the subtlest intellect that America has given to the world, the flowering of long generations of American scholarship and breeding, the most fitting embodiment of American thought, emancipated and disenthralled. The greatest esthetic triumph of American democracy was typified in the person of Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803-1882).

To trace the genesis of American "transcendentalism" to its primal springs, it would be necessary to study the history of Puritanism from its origin. One of its literary progenitors may be said to have had its birth in the year that Emerson was born. The need of a periodical, aiming at a high standard of literary excellence, unhampered by sectarianism, was early felt. A quarterly, called "The Literary Miscellany," was begun in 1803 at Harvard, including among its contributors John Quincy Adams, Andrews Norton, and Joseph S. Buckminster. The name was shortly afterward changed to "The Monthly Anthology," and its office removed to Boston. It was published under the auspices of the Anthology Club, composed of some of the leading New England thinkers of the day. Channing,

Norton, Buckminster, and William Emerson, the poet's father, frequently contributed. The tone of the publication, which lasted about eight years, was "liberal" throughout, and did much to stimulate the drift of theological opinion at the time. It was this club that, at the suggestion of William Emerson, established a library of periodical literature, which proved to be the nucleus of the Boston Athenæum.<sup>1</sup>

A quarter of a century later the "Transcendental Club" held its first meeting at the house of Mr. George Ripley, in Boston, September 19, 1836. Among the distinguished members of the club, besides Emerson and Ripley, were A. Bronson Alcott, F. H. Hedge, J. Freeman Clarke, C. A. Bartol, O. A. Brownson, Theodore Parker, Margaret Fuller, and Miss Elizabeth Peabody. The old spirit of Calvinism, typified in the elder Beecher, was on the wane. Norton and Channing were the most conspicuous representatives of the new faith. The tendencies of current theology were the frequent subject of discussion before the club.

"To show how the topics about which I have been speaking interested the club," Mr. Alcott writes, "in May, 1838, the same company again met, and we discussed the question, 'Is Mysticism an Element of Christianity?' That question touched the seat and root of things. Jones Very's 'Poems and Essays' were published in September, 1839; very significant they were, too; as if in answer to the inquiry whether Mysticism was an element of Christianity, here was an illustration of it in a living person, himself present at the club. They are very remarkable poems and essays. There had been nothing printed until 'Nature,' unless it may have been Mr. Sampson Reed's little

<sup>1</sup> George W. Cook's *Life of Emerson*, p. 14.

book, called 'The Growth of the Mind,' which had intimated genius of the like subtle, chaste, and simple quality."

The "new views," as they were termed, of the Transcendentalists were not new, but simply a rehabilitation of old truths long since lost sight of. The theory of innate ideas, "transcending the senses and understanding," as opposed to the experimental theories of Locke, received new significance. Intuitive notions of right and wrong, the impressions of conscience, were exalted above the dogmatics of the most revered teachers. Above and beyond the warnings of hoary tradition, appealed the voice of nature in the human soul. "God is, not was," seemed to be the watchword of the new Puritan revolt.

"Our age," wrote Emerson in 1836, "is retrospective. It builds the sepulchres of our fathers. It writes biographies, history, and criticism. The foregoing generations beheld God and nature face to face; we, through their eyes. Why should not we also enjoy an original relation to the universe? Why should not we have a poetry and philosophy of insight and not of tradition, and a religion of revelation to us, and not the history of theirs? Embosomed for a season in nature, whose floods of life stream around and through us and invite us, by the powers they supply, to action proportioned to nature, why should we grope among the dry bones of the past, or put the living generation into masquerade out of its faded wardrobe? The sun shines to-day, also. There is more wool and flax in the fields. There are new lands, new men, new thoughts. Let us demand our own works and laws and worship."

How or by whom the term "Transcendentalists" was

first applied to these New England reformers is a matter of no importance. The movement itself was but another exhibition of the Puritan spirit, that from its inception had an uncomfortable habit of breaking out in transitory eruptions in the shape of protests against what seemed to be improper tendencies. "What is popularly called Transcendentalism among us," said Mr. Emerson, "is Idealism,—Idealism as it appears in 1842."

As opposed to the materialist, basing his theories on fact and the animal wants of man, the idealist insists on "the power of Thought and of Will, on inspiration, on miracle, on individual culture. This way of thinking," he adds, "falling on Roman times, made Stoic philosophers; falling on despotic times, made patriot Catos and Brutuses; falling on superstitious times, made prophets and apostles; on popish times, made Protestants and ascetic monks, preachers of Faith against preachers of Works; on prelatical times, made Puritans and Quakers; and falling on Unitarian and commercial times, makes the peculiar shades of Idealism which we know." Emerson himself disclaimed the possibility of such a thing as pure transcendentalism, though, as he asserted, the conversation and poetry of the day were deeply coloured by the tendency to respect intuitions, and predicted that the history of the genius and religion of the time would be the history of that tendency.

The idealism was but the legitimate development of the doctrines of Peter Bulkeley, Emerson's earliest American ancestor, shorn of Puritan bigotry and superstition. It was a revived form of Puritan aspiration toward an ideal, though against the ascetic spirit of the old had reacted the esthetic spirit of the new.

The laureate of Puritanism in the seventeenth century embodied his convictions in the query, —

“For what is beauty but a faded flower?  
Or what is pleasure but the Devil's bait,  
Whereby he catcheth whom he would devour,  
And multitudes of souls doth ruinate?”

For the modern idealist nature with all her lavish gifts inspires serenest pleasure, and it is sufficient to know that “Beauty is its own excuse for being.”

Humor seems to be an essential part of Nature's plans. The sombre dramatic effects of all great reformatory movements are relieved by the vagaries of enthusiasts, that, like the clowns of Shakspeare's tragedies, act as foils to the pervading solemnity. The so-called transcendental movement produced its share of idealists run mad, in whose muddled consciousness “intuitive ideas” were hopelessly confused with a form of shallow self-conceit. Against this superficial and unthinking radicalism came the calm warning from the chief prophet of the movement. His opening remarks in his lecture of March 3, 1844, show that he was still treading upon solid ground, while some of his converts and devotees were revelling in the frenzy of their newly-developed “ideas.” These, in their ambitious efforts to hitch their wagon to a star, became hopelessly involved in the nebulous mists of abstract theorizing and speculation, in which the principles of common-sense were completely ignored. They furnished a little harmless amusement for the time, but soon passed out of the public mind.

Naturally, such independent thinkers as the genuine modern idealists, as distinguished from the irresponsible camp-followers, needed some “organ” in which their views could be promulgated, if not systematized.

No two of these earnest reformers seemed to think alike on any one subject, and a unity of design was out of the question. Still, it was necessary to have some vehicle for the expression of views, however discordant. After much thought and careful preparation, a quarterly periodical was launched upon the reading world. The prospectus was dated, "Boston, May 4, 1840," and among other things announced, "'The Dial,' as its title indicates, will endeavor to occupy a position upon which the light may fall; which is open to the rising sun; and from which it may correctly report the progress of the hour and the day." It came into being under the guidance of Margaret Fuller as editor, Mr. George Ripley being for a short time editorial contributor. It was devoted to literature, philosophy, and religion. The contributors were all young, ardent, enthusiastic reformers. It was intended to be the exponent of the "new thought."

The progress recorded by "The Dial," however, was not all hours of sunshine. Its utterances were fearless, and therefore, at the time, unpopular. It was the literary Winkelried that, gathering to itself the shafts of ridicule, abuse, and calumny, valiantly fought its way through the ranks of hostile criticism. Its marked independence and individuality were especially shocking to that class of literati who, basking in the sunshine of tradition and convention, stand aghast at the boldness of self-asserting genius. From the start its tone was high, especially in poetry and criticism. A journal which gave to the world much that has since taken high rank in American classics had certainly established its right to be. Its initial number was the first to publish the most perfect of Emerson's poems, "The Problem."



"The Dial" was not a financial or popular success. As in the case of other high-class periodicals of the time, its career was a continual struggle for life. After two years of precarious existence, its editor was ready to abandon it in despair, when Mr. Emerson came to her relief, and at considerable personal sacrifice, assumed editorial control, presiding over its destinies until it expired, at the end of its fourth year, July, 1844. Cold as was its reception, its influence upon our literature was pronounced. It was the first literary magazine of high rank infused by a truly American spirit. In discarding traditions of the past, it appealed to the untrammelled conscience, and earnestly strove for the upbuilding of individuality and self-reliance, as opposed to the prevalent spirit of dependence and imitation. As Colonel T. W. Higginson has wisely said, "Behind all the catchwords, and even cant, if you please, of the 'Transcendentalists,' lay the fact that they looked immediately around them for their stimulus, their scenery, their illustrations, and their properties. After fifty years of national life, the skylark and nightingale were at last dethroned from our literature, and in the very first volume of "The Dial" the blue-bird and the wood-thrush took their place. Since then they have held their own; birds and flowers are recognized as a part of the local coloring; not as mere transportable property, to be brought over by emigrants in their boxes, and good only as having crossed the ocean. Americans still go to England to hear the skylark, but Englishmen also come to America to hear the bobolink."<sup>1</sup>

In the spring of 1841 Mr. Ripley abandoned his connection with "The Dial" to organize another project

<sup>1</sup> Life of Margaret Fuller, p. 136.

which is popularly identified with the "Transcendental" movement. This was the establishment of Brook Farm, at West Roxbury, near Boston. In its inception nothing could be further from its design than the communistic theories vaguely associated with its memory. It was simply an attempt to reduce to practice the ideas of intellectual and domestic life then agitating the thinking world of America and England. Though generally regarded as a phase of "Transcendentalism," it should be remembered that foremost leaders of the "Transcendentalists," like Emerson, Alcott, Thoreau, and Margaret Fuller, were never members of the "community," while some of the active members, notably Hawthorne, George W. Curtis, and Charles A. Dana, were not particularly identified with the followers of Emerson and his doctrines. The Brook Farm experiment, at the end of six years, culminated in financial disaster. Emerson, although an occasional visitor, never felt much confidence in it, and the apprehensions that he early expressed as to its practicability were more than realized. The prominence of the parties engaged in it gave it a world-wide fame, and the spiritualizing genius of Hawthorne has, perhaps, immortalized it; but it can hardly be said to have accomplished anything toward the reformation of society. The times were not ripe for a modern Arcadia, and the sterile soil of West Roxbury was not propitious to idealized farming.

Biographers of Emerson delight to dwell upon the peculiarly American caste of his ancestry, whose history is in a great degree the history of the development of New England thought. The Emerson family has contributed at least fifty graduates to New England colleges, of whom twenty were ministers. It may be

added that his mother's family were noted for a "remarkable spirituality of temperament, for great religious zeal, and were naturally mystics or pietists."<sup>1</sup> The facts of his uneventful life may be summed up in a few words: He was born in Boston, May 25, 1803; attended school in his native city, and graduated from Harvard with the class of 1821. After graduation he taught school under Dr. Channing, studied divinity in 1829, became the associate, and shortly after, the successor of Henry Ware, Jr., in the pastorate of the Second Church of Boston. It was here that he so far defied public opinion as to allow anti-slavery orators to speak from his pulpit. In 1832, declining to conform to even the liberal tenets of his church, he resigned, though he continued to preach for several years. He made his first visit to Europe in 1833. In the following year he removed to his ancestral home at Concord, the "Old Manse," since made world-renowned by Hawthorne. Purchasing a place of his own in that village, he there made his home for over forty years. It was while living at the "Manse" that he wrote his booklet, "Nature" (1836), in which he sounded the key-note of his philosophy. He made a lecturing trip to England in 1847, and a third visit in 1872. During his earlier visits he formed the acquaintance of Coleridge, Wordsworth, Carlyle, and other celebrities. In 1874 he was the unsuccessful candidate against Benjamin Disraeli for the rectorship of Glasgow University. His life was that of a man of letters, serene, yet immensely potent. He was a devout champion of the rights of man, a constitutional dissenter, but avoiding polemics; the gentlest of iconoclasts, the most practical of optimists, the most conservative of radicals, the most magnetic of reformers.

<sup>1</sup> Cooke's *Life of Emerson*, p. 14.

There was plenty in his first volume of poems (1846) for the routine critic to pounce upon and ridicule. The boldness, carelessness of form, idealism, and frequent obscurity of his verse astonished the Philistines. The American reviewer, taking his cues from transatlantic writers, would, for the most part, find little to approve. So opposed to prevailing fashions were these utterances, so original and yet so wise their underlying ideas, as sorely to perplex the literary Rhadamanthus, prone to measure everything by the square and line of recognized "canons of taste." Thoughtful readers were not lacking, however, who appreciated the depth, the music, the significance of these mystic songs. Their theme and sentiment were fresh and unhackneyed, though they were almost entirely lacking in the warmth and passion of popular verse. It was a prolific period in American poetry, having produced much that was both new and beautiful, but nothing so original, so self-sustaining, so free from foreign influence. Here was American poetry that was neither imitative nor feeble. Its spirit was oracular without aggressiveness; broadly humanitarian, but free from that spirit of boastfulness still associated with notions of "nationalism."

Thirteen years after the collapse of "The Dial" public taste had been so far developed as to justify the establishment of a periodical of the highest class. It is doubtful if "The Atlantic Monthly" would have been much more successful than its feeble predecessor, if published in 1840. But appealing to a larger audience, and occupying a broader field, its appearance was one of the epochal events in our literary history. Its opening number (November, 1857) contained the first instalment of Holmes' "Autocrat," and contributions by Prescott, Motley, Longfellow, Lowell, Whittier,

Trowbridge, Mrs. Stowe, Rose Terry, and Charles Eliot Norton, besides a little group of verses entitled, respectively, "The Romany Girl," "The Chartist's Complaint," "Days," and "Brahma." All the articles were then published anonymously, but no signature was necessary to identify the authorship of these four poems. The Emersonian flavor was clearly perceptible, and at least one of them obtained immediate notoriety, if not fame. Witlings made haste to advertise their ignorance by ridiculing and parodying "Brahma," unconscious that it was but a reproduction, in Emersonian language, of passages in one of the world's classics.

Emerson made no pretence to the establishment of a philosophic system. In one of his early essays he frankly declared: "I own I am gladdened by seeing the predominance of the saccharine principle throughout vegetable nature, and not less by beholding in morals that unrestrained inundation of the principle of good into every chink and hole that selfishness has left open, yea, into selfishness and sin itself; so that no evil is pure, nor hell itself without its extreme satisfactions. But lest I should mislead any, when I have my own head and obey my whims, let me remind the reader that I am only an experimenter. Do not set the least value on what I do, or the least discredit on what I do not, as if I pretended to settle anything as true or false. I unsettle all things. No facts are to me sacred; none are profane; I simply experiment, an endless seeker, with no past at my back."

He was the advocate of the individual conscience, but it was always on the assumption that the impulses of intuition conformed to the principles of high conduct. It is his exalted standard of right living that

has distinguished him from those sophists whose theories of "intuitive ideas" would dispense with moral responsibility.

The theory that what is regarded as evil must eventually result in good, is older than Christianity. But no modern writer has more forcibly expounded it than has Emerson. Evil, by its very "ministrations of pain," reacts upon itself through universal law.

It was the finitude of evil, its ultimate tendency to react and bless, that Uriel announced, staggering the angels themselves by the force of the dogma.

The force of moral character was always strongly urged by Emerson, for, as he expressed it, it is that which all men profess to regard, and by their real respect for it recommend themselves to each other. "It was for good, it is to good, that all works." "Morals is the direction of the will on universal ends. He is immoral who is acting to any private end." It is this moral sentiment that alone is omnipotent, and renders man capable of any sacrifice.

The imagination of Emerson is by turns delicate and refined, striking and bold. "Monadnoc" contains imaginative passages of such startling originality as, were it not for the frequently infelicitous diction, would alone make the reputation of a poet.

The whispering of the pines, the throbbing of the ocean, the silence of the mountain, — all have for him a deep spiritual meaning. The gladness of the woods is an inspiration.

His devotion to nature is that of a poet rather than of a naturalist. He is impatient of botanical pedantries. For him one hour's communing with nature brings more than the ages have recorded in the books. All birds he would name without a gun, and leave the

loved wood-rose on the stalk. Yet to the teachings of geology and evolution in their broadest sense, his mind is ever open. It is in Emerson that modern science finds tuneful voice. As Shakspeare seems to have anticipated Harvey's discovery of the circulation of the blood, so Emerson seems to have anticipated certain forms of the doctrine of evolution. His first treatise, "Nature," was written before Darwin published his first book, and was printed eight years before the appearance of the anonymous work, "Vestiges of Creation." Throughout this treatise, as well as in his earlier addresses and essays, are scattered sentences and aphorisms, startling and enigmatical enough when first uttered, but which, studied in the light of advanced thought during the succeeding half-century, seem like veritable revelations.

It is because of his optimism, his faith and his hope, that Emerson has come by many to be regarded as the most profoundly American singer yet produced. He was the champion of an ideal republicanism, of the independence of the mind, the emancipation of the soul. His writings give the hint of what the literature of democracy is yet to be. It goes without saying that he was a patriot to the core. There are critics who admit the beauty of his "occasional poems," yet deny to them the characteristics of his genius. But surely, his "Concord Hymn," his Fourth of July "Ode," his "Voluntaries," and his "Boston Hymn," are as genuinely Emersonian as anything that he has written.

Emerson's enthusiasm for the beautiful was that of a mystic and a philosopher, as well as that of a poet. Poe himself was not a greater devotee in this respect. Beauty, with the latter, was to be sought for the pleasure to be gained. With Emerson, such pleasure was a

mere incident, for with him love, truth, and beauty were one. Emerson has left us some beautiful lyrics, but his defective versification places him far below Poe, so far as mere form is concerned. Poe's favorite angel was Israfel, whose heart-strings are a lute, and the lyrist's whole being thrilled in unison with the high-born melody. Emerson's ideal was Uriel, the angel of light, who dared proclaim the truth, though gods and angels should protest, and even if "the balance beam of Fate was bent," and "the bounds of good and ill were rent." Poe denounced Emerson for his "Transcendentalism," though the great lyrist's prose-poem, "Eureka," contained more "transcendental nonsense" than can be found in all the twelve volumes of Mr. Emerson's works. It is noteworthy, also, that Mr. Emerson, in his "Parnassus," could find no place for the author of "The Raven."

Acknowledged defects of Emerson's style are obscurity, vagueness, and apparent inconsecutiveness. Perhaps all this is the natural result of one of his chief virtues. He is a master of compression. His shrewd observations, tersely uttered, have enriched the world's store of proverbial sayings. Many of the lines of his "Problem" have passed into current speech.

A whole treatise on the subject of lost opportunity is condensed in his eleven-line poem, "Days," just as a whole sermon can be extracted from the eight-line poem on "Forbearance."

Perhaps the most salient, because the most true, aspersions which Matthew Arnold, in his singularly inappreciative address on Emerson, casts upon Emerson's verse, are those having reference to the superficial quality of form. Emerson's peculiarities are obvious. The grammatical constructions in his verse



are, it must be admitted, sometimes awkward; the subjects and objects of his verbs often hopelessly jumbled; and his pronouns are sometimes disagreeably placed in reference to antecedents. These characteristics, or if you will, mannerisms, are, however, so distinctly his own, that his admirers willingly accept them, with halting lines and faulty rhymes, rather than blur or blot a single one of his characteristic utterances. The inner sense is gladly receptive to profound truths, even though the manner of expression sometimes jars on the sensitive ear.

Emerson carried his idealism into politics as well as morals. His ideal republic, hinted at in his writings, and foreshadowed in his conversation at Stonehenge, as related in "English Traits," is but the American principle carried to its logical fulfilment. That America should be something more than, and something different from the Old World, that its ultimate civilization should be something more than a transplanted product, was no mere dream with him. Above all the discordant, turbulent, materialistic elements of our life, he could still discern the true spirit of America, evolving itself, destined, in spite of all, to fulfil its high mission. Unlike many reformers, Emerson never outgrew the buoyant hope of his youth. The serene optimism of his early manhood was the firm conviction of his old age. True to the spirit of the exalted strain which may be regarded as the termination of his poetic career, he "obeyed at eve the voice obeyed at prime," as he calmly awaited the final message to launch upon that unknown sea "whose every wave is charmed."

Upon his receipt of the first number of "The Dial," Thomas Carlyle wrote: "It is an utterance of what is

purest, youngest in your land; pure, ethereal as the voices of the Morning! And yet, for me it is *too* ethereal, speculative, theoretic; all theory becomes more confessedly inadequate, untrue, unsatisfactory, almost a kind of mockery to me! I will have all things condense themselves, take shape and body, if they are to have my sympathy." A year later his judgment had evidently not been changed, for he exclaims: "'The Dial' is all spirit-like, aeriform, aurora-borealis-like. Will no *Angel* body himself out of that; no stalwart Yankee *man*, with color in the cheeks of him, and a coat on his back."<sup>1</sup> It is useless to deny the justice of these comments. Nebulous as were the utterances of many of these idealists, the animating motive was for good. Without form, and frequently void, as these chaotic elements often were, they were still destined to crystallize into a certain order and consistency that marked them as among the first manifestations of distinctively American song. They were the product of our own land and century, and embodied the higher protests against certain forces that were tending to degrade and emasculate true American thought.

In numbers the idealists form an important group. Jones Very (1813-1880), referred to more at length in a previous chapter, early illustrated the connection between mysticism and Christianity. He rendered implicit obedience to the promptings of the Spirit, concerning himself but little with results. He cast the glamour of his devout idealism over the most prosaic objects, from the acorn and the barberry bush to the railway, the telegraph, and the telephone. Emerson early discovered his talents and took an active

<sup>1</sup> Carlyle-Emerson Correspondence, I., 330 and 383.

interest in the publication of his first volume. His collection of sonnets has been pronounced the best produced in America, and Charles Eliot Norton refers to him as an exquisite spirit, some of whose poems "are as if written by a George Herbert, who had studied Shakespeare, read Wordsworth, and lived in America." Yet the monotonous tone that from first to last pervades these rhythmic chants sadly detracts from their undoubted beauty. The same may be said of the little collection of "Sonnets and Canzonets" of A. Bronson Alcott (1799-1888). As an educator and thinker, and as the founder of the Concord School of Philosophy, Alcott is deserving of profound respect and even admiration. He stood closest to Emerson, and, like Emerson, was at first thoroughly misunderstood. Lacking Emerson's shrewd common-sense, Alcott's idealism sometimes led him into vagaries, injurious chiefly to himself. His prose far outranks his verse, both in bulk and quality, placing him in the foremost ranks of our speculative writers. A Pennsylvanian by birth, a New Englander by residence, and Platonist by nature, philanthropist, theologian, and experimenter, his sayings, "Orphic," and otherwise, have a distinct individuality.

Of all Emerson's followers, probably the most conspicuous was Henry D. Thoreau (1817-1862). His few published poems are mere hints of what might have been expected. The "Poet Naturalist" had a superb disdain of popular success. With devout reverence he prayed, —

"Great God! I ask Thee for no meaner pelf,  
Than that I may not disappoint myself."

Though in some respects his life was not an unlimited success, a disappointment it certainly was not

either to his own high ideals or to the reasonable expectations of his friends. His poetic spirit finds its best expression in his prose.

It is not unlikely that Margaret Fuller, afterwards Countess d'Ossoli, will live longer in such memorials as have been written of her by Emerson, Higginson, and Mrs. Howe, than in her own writings. Certain it is that her prose is now but little read, and her verse still less. Yet in her day she accomplished much, and next to Emerson and Alcott, may be ranked with George Ripley among the leaders of the "Transcendental" movement.

Margaret Fuller was born at Cambridgeport, Massachusetts, May 23, 1810, of Puritan ancestry, and was forty years old at the time of her death. Her childhood could hardly have been a cheerful one. In July, 1825, she wrote: "I rise a little before five, walk an hour, and then practise on the piano till seven, when we breakfast. Next I read French, Sismondi's 'Literature of the South of Europe,' till eight, then two or three lectures in Brown's Philosophy. About half-past nine I go to Mr. Perkins' school and study Greek till twelve, when, the school being dismissed, I recite, go home, and practise again till dinner, at two. Sometimes, if the conversation is very agreeable, I lounge for half an hour over the dessert, though rarely so lavish of time. Then when I can, I read two hours in Italian, but I am often interrupted. At six I walk or take a drive. Before going to bed, I play or sing for half an hour, and about eleven retire to write a little while in my journal, — exercises on what I have read, or a series of characteristics which I am filling up according to advice."

This seems like a formidable programme for a young

girl barely turned fifteen. The next year she was studying, "with great delight," Madame de Staël, Epictetus, Milton, Racine, and Castilian ballads; and in 1827 was devoting critical attention to the older Italian poets. Subsequently she familiarized herself with the German poets and philosophers, and studied art. The culture thus acquired, so far from being superficial, as might be inferred from its variety, was profound and lasting. Its effect upon an original mind like Margaret's was stimulating. She scorned the dull level of the commonplace and aspired only to the highest ideals. "Yes, O Goethe!" she somewhere writes, "but the ideal is truer than the actual. This changes and that changes not." She honestly strove to live up to her own ideals, whether championing intellectual freedom in America or political freedom in Italy. As a pioneer in the cause of woman's advancement, in her labors as reformer, critic, teacher, conversationalist, and correspondent, in her experiences in Italy, and her services in the cause of the Italian patriots, in her calmness in the closing hours of the ill-starred homeward voyage, culminating in shipwreck off Fire Island, and the drowning of herself, husband, and child, she displayed the tenderness of a woman united with the wisdom of a remarkable genius. Her watchword through life was "Truth," — truth and loyalty to conscience, to reason, and to nature, and truth and sincerity in literature, art, and every conduct of life. It was her devotion to truth, as the truth appeared to her, that led her sometimes to write and say disagreeable things. Though her metrical efforts are few, it is because of the influence that she exercised and the principles that she exemplified, that she is entitled to an honorable mention in the history of

American song. It is in such of her poems as "Life a Temple," "Encouragement," and "Sub Rosa Crux" that her characteristics best appear.

This group of poets of idealism might be extended to include such earnest singers as D. A. Wasson (1823-1887), Charles T. Brooks (1813-1883), J. S. Dwight, better known as a musician, whose stanzas entitled "Rest" breathe the genuine spirit, the Sturgis sisters, Mrs. Julia Ward Howe, next to Margaret Fuller, perhaps the most intellectual woman America has produced, and later, F. B. Sanborn and Thomas W. Higginson, whose poetic gifts have been too much slighted for the more unrestricted medium of their attractive prose. There are two, however, especially noteworthy.

Thoreau's friend and biographer, William Ellery Channing, son of Walter Channing, and nephew of the great divine from whom he was named, is frequently referred to as a poet for poets. Apparently he has not always been successful with even this limited audience, if Poe's malignant diatribe is entitled to any weight. The slowness of popular recognition has not deterred Mr. Channing from publishing several volumes of verse, mostly in a meditative strain. He is a disciple of Emerson, to whom he owes much. His poetry shows scholarship, tenderness of feeling, love of nature, and a certain visionary idealism.

Christopher Pearce Cranch was one of the most regular contributors to "The Dial," and wrote probably the best American poem on the death of Margaret Fuller. His writings are marked by a profound ethical insight, bold original thought, deep poetic fancy, and, what is too rare in poets of this class, a clear, lucid style and correct, musical rhythm. From his artistic and musical accomplishments, his verse seems to have acquired

both picturesqueness and melody. His long poem, "Satan," is thoroughly characteristic. Published thirty years after the collapse of "The Dial," the poem, or "Libretto," as its author terms it, is significant as embodying the tenets of the "liberal" faith extended far beyond the limits of the Concord circle. The underlying thought is not new, but the exposition of an ethical principle in operatic form is a bold conception.

One of Mr. Cranch's most obvious traits is his all-abounding charity. The same geniality of temperament which leads him to reject the personality of the devil, leads him to look for excellence in what is sometimes worse than evil itself, — an insipid mediocrity. This is clearly illustrated in his pleasing poem, "The American Pantheon." He shows more versatility than any of his companion idealists. The miscellaneous collection in "The Bird and the Bell" exhibits his abilities as a gentle humorist as well as poetical philosopher. His rendering of Virgil's "Æneid," while not up to the standard of translations set by Bryant, Longfellow, Taylor, Parsons, or Brooks, evinces true and careful scholarship, and fairly reflects the poetic spirit of the original.

"Transcendentalism" bore to intellectual life a relation similar to that borne by abolitionism to the political. They both appealed to the conscience; the one against spiritual, the other against physical servitude. Each produced its heroes, each its fanatics. Each aimed at a reform, deep, lasting, and radical. Freedom and abstract justice, the dignity of man, the elevation of the race, emancipation from established wrongs, were the common aims. The era of transcendentalism has passed away. Has literature been the gainer by

this modern idealism? The increasing influence of Emerson is the best answer. The puny barriers of prejudice and intolerance have long since crumbled away before the serene wisdom of his eloquence. Critics now realize that in attacking "Emersonism," they are attacking vital points in Christianity. Orthodox and heterodox alike find delight in his works. Matthew Arnold, so chary in his praise of the Concord poet, was still of the opinion that "Emerson's Essays are the most important work done in prose" in our language during the present century. This judgment is apparently based on Emerson's conviction that in the life of the spirit is happiness, and by the hope that "this life of the spirit will come more and more to be sanely understood, and to prevail and to work for happiness." It is strange that the English critic could not find the same qualities in Emerson's poetry as in his prose. "The life of the spirit" is the groundwork of Emerson's verse, as it was the soul of the whole so-called "Transcendental school." It is true, the poetry of Emerson was to that of the minor singers of his class as the sunlight is to moonlight. But moonlight has its uses.

Whatever may be said in condemnation of "Transcendentalism," it still stood as a most active force in American letters. It originated the nearest approach to what, for want of a better name, may be vaguely termed "the American school." It produced and stimulated more profound, radical, and original thought than any other branch of our literature. Though we no longer hear of it as a living factor, its exponents under different names are scattered throughout the land, and its influence has reached beyond the sea. Emerson probably has not so many readers in Europe as either



Longfellow or Poe, but what is more to the purpose, has his students, followers, and disciples. He is the recognized American thinker, whose thoughts as readily adapt themselves to verse as to prose. It is no small thing that in an age devoted to material and commercial pursuits, the warning voices of these idealists should be raised with sufficient clearness to compel attention and even admiration. It proves, if nothing else, that the repulsive rigidity of early American Puritanism could develop into forms of rare beauty and excellence.

In 1855 "The Dial" and Brook Farm were mere memories, when another revolt against the established was to be recorded. This time it was the spirit of realism, a counterpoise rather than a reaction against that of New England idealism. Attempts to start an obviously, designedly, and obtrusively national literature had become stale and hackneyed years before, even in the dawn of what we to-day recognize as American letters. All these mechanical efforts have been deservedly forgotten. In 1855, among American readers, Homer and Virgil had not been displaced by Dwight and Barlow. Paulding and Neal remained unread. Experience had taught us that literature to be genuine must be spontaneous, a natural growth, and not an artificial mechanism. With the history of these abortive attempts fresh in our minds, how jejune and conventional, from at least one point of view, was Mr. Whitman's contention for originality when, discussing his own book, he wrote: "What play of Shakspeare represented in America is not an insult to America, to the marrow in its bones? . . . Sure as the heavens envelop the earth, if the Americans want a race of bards worthy of 1855, and of the

stern reality of this republic, they must cast around for men essentially different from the old poets, and from the modern successions of jinglers, and snivellers, and fops." As a remedy he offered his "Leaves of Grass," which, to use his own words, was "to prove either the most lamentable of failures or the most glorious of triumphs in the known history of literature." Americans, however, continue to swallow, with equanimity, the "insults" of Shakspeare, and after the lapse of forty years have not yet repudiated the works of Poe, Emerson, Longfellow, and other "jinglers, snivellers, and fops" that so exasperated the bard of Paumanok.

It may as well be conceded at once that many of the alleged characteristics of Whitman had already become familiar even to superficial students of literature. His most ardent panegyrists will not claim that his substitution of rhythm for meter is an innovation. Nor is there anything especially commendable in the coinage of words and phrases that serve no purpose not filled by others already in use. His long and verbose catalogings, aside from Homeric precedent, were anticipated in the very beginning of American civilization. Morrell's "Nova Anglia" (1624) and Wood's "New England Prospect" (1634) were little more than a metrical classification of the fauna and flora of the new colony.

The superficial faults of Whitman are too obtrusive to be ignored in a discussion of his works. It is but just to apply to a consideration of himself the same absolute candor that he manifests in his own treatment of matters. He chose to pose as a reactionist, while stigmatizing the works of his contemporaries in England and America. He proposed to himself a set theory,

and throughout all his verse is the conscious intention to exemplify such a theory. Scorning the atmosphere of scholasticism and even good breeding, he went to the other extreme of idealizing "powerful uneducated persons." The mincing airs of society exasperated him and drove him to the more congenial surroundings of the slums and docks, oblivious of the fact that the jocularities and by-words of such resorts are as stale and trite, and therefore in a certain sense as conventional as the wearisome platitudes of the respectably dull. As music and melody were inherent in his soul, he must have realized that his frequently affected uncouthness was the height of artificialism. That he exaggerated almost to a travesty his own theories is indicated by his subsequent pruning of much that was objectionable in the early editions. He has, however, left us his finally revised volume of poetry, as commended to his maturest judgment, and upon this, with all its vulgarities and vulgarisms, its affectations and artificialities, his fame as a poet must rest. If he is indeed the typical bard of "These States," there would, at first thought, seem to be some truth in the cynic's sneer that the mission of America was "to vulgarize mankind."

To say that poetry is the highest of all arts is to state a truism. Poetry without art of some kind is a paradox. Without attempting to open a subject now become threadbare, it is perhaps sufficient for our purpose to base our objections to many of the most fiercely condemned passages in "Leaves of Grass," on purely artistic rather than moral grounds. A very small portion of this volume is taken up with a group of poems entitled "Children of Adam." It is these that have been so unduly extolled by the poet's admirers, and

have attracted so much attention from the prurient and impure. If the underlying thought, the animating purpose of this little group is obscene, then humanity itself is but the offspring and personification of lust. The meaning of such a poem, like that of a legal instrument, must be gathered from the intention as expressed in the writing itself taken as a whole. No pure and sane mind, after carefully studying the context, can reasonably object to the alleged immorality of these few pieces. On artistic and literary grounds, however, they are decidedly offensive, and Emerson was abundantly justified in importuning their author to expunge them. They are as devoid of imaginative beauty and otherwise as unpoetic as a medical treatise. It must also be borne in mind that while Mr. Whitman is hailed as especially the poet of democracy, his poems have utterly failed to arouse a sympathetic response in the hearts of the democratic masses. His most appreciative admirers at home and abroad are from the very class for whom he expresses such disdain. His devotees come from the aristocracy of the intellectual, not from the ranks of what he extols as the "divine average." If he is the poet of democracy, he is in no sense a poet of the people. Nor is there any reason why we should overlook his frequently exasperating prolixity, redundancy, vagueness, and obscurity, his confused thoughts confusedly expressed, his needlessly imperfect grammar, his twaddling repetitions of such expressions as "I swear," and "I guess," and, as entirely distinct from his aggressive egotism, the inordinate vanity that led him to write "puffing" notices of his own works.

Having thus performed the ungracious but necessary task of dilating upon the weaknesses of a truly great-hearted man, there remains the more congenial duty of

recognizing the undoubted merits of one of the potent factors in the literary history of his age. At the outset, however, we must be permitted to record our dissent from the poet's already quoted estimate of his own work as "either the most lamentable of failures or the most glorious of triumphs in the known history of literature." It was neither. Yet no work of mere mediocrity could elicit such encomiums from eminent thinkers in Europe and America. In our own country, thinkers as dissentient as Emerson and Joel Chandler Harris, Thoreau and Joaquin Miller, Stedman and Ingersoll, W. S. Kennedy and W. D. O'Connor, Burroughs and Garland, Bucke and Lanier, besides others equally noted, have acknowledged his greatness. In England, to mention but a few, Tennyson, Ruskin, W. M. Rossetti, Sir Edwin Arnold, Robert Buchanan, Symonds, and William Clarke have paid the tributes of unstinted admiration. His praises have been sounded in the French, German, and Danish tongues, and one of his most discriminating admirers has called attention to the fact that Whitman's poetry was to be discussd before a literary society at Padua.<sup>1</sup>

In earliest manhood, probably about 1840, the poet had begun evolving in his mind the elements of "Leaves of Grass." The last complete edition was published in his seventy-third year (1891-1892). This volume may, therefore, be said to represent half a century of literary life. Here his scattered poems, systematically collated, present a unity of purpose that at once explains and exalts the original design. The twelve poems of the first edition have increased to nearly four hundred. No other work in American literature has had such a

<sup>1</sup> J. Addington Symonds, "Walt Whitman: A Study," XXXV., London, 1893.

history. With apparently serene indifference alike to the abuse and misconstruction of enemies, the ridicule of witlings, the persecution by bigots, and the indiscriminate eulogy by friends, "brave, hopeful Walt" pursued his way, thinking, observing, and writing, never flinching from the toilsome path he had marked out, following the inner light as he was given to see it, considering nothing common or unclean that God had created, and putting to a practical test the examples and precepts inculcated by the founder of Christianity himself. To his simple loving soul, a leaf of grass was as strangely beautiful as "the journey-work of the stars." To the generation that had not entirely forgotten the period of "Elegant Extracts," of sentimental annuals like "Amaranthine Leaves," "Floral Tributes," "Heart Blossoms," *et id omne genus*, one would suppose that this breezy book, with its title, "Leaves of Grass," would be refreshing and purifying. Not so. The first edition had no sale. Some copies were sent to the press for criticism, but received only abuse and ridicule even more scurrilous than that visited upon Emerson's first volume of verse. Other copies were as an act of courtesy sent to "prominent literary men." A number of these presentation copies were returned, "in some cases accompanied by insulting notes." The second and enlarged edition (1856) found few purchasers and still fewer intelligent readers. The author was experiencing what his brother poet had pronounced one of the attributes of greatness. He was being misunderstood. The advisability of criminal prosecution was seriously discussed, but the matter was dropped when it was suggested that the poet's personal popularity would prevent a conviction. The publishers, however, were frightened into withdrawing the book from sale.

The third edition (1860) presented the author's position in more coherent form, and found here and there a purchaser, and even admirer. Shortly afterward the publishers failed, and the book passed out of public notice. But the "Leaves" could not be left unmolested. The author was the first poet in the United States to suffer official persecution for his writings. His earnest efforts in behalf of literary reform, his sacrificing labors in personally administering to the wants of upward of a hundred thousand of his nation's sick and wounded defenders, counted for nothing with his official chief. When it was understood that Whitman was the author of "Leaves of Grass," he was, in spite of past services and present poverty, summarily dismissed from his modest clerkship in the Interior Department at Washington. This act of intolerance and injustice (1865) was afterward in a measure atoned for by his appointment to a position in the Department of Justice, which he was obliged to give up on account of increasing ill health.

Trouble was still ahead for "Leaves of Grass" and its author. He had lost the position in the Attorney-General's Department, that assured him a small but steady income, was broken in health and miserably poor, his book his only financial resource. "And now," says his biographer, "two men in succession, in New York, in whose hands the sale of the book on commission had been placed, took advantage of his helplessness to embezzle the amounts due (they calculated that death would soon settle the score and rule it out)." Later (1881) the seventh edition had been printed in a handsome volume by a distinguished Boston publishing-house. The imprint of this firm was in itself a passport to the society of the elect. It was a practical recognition from a source that must have been most gratifying to

the poet and his friends. But certain individuals like those unhealthful personages who are thrown into spiritual hysterics by a contemplation of the "nude in art" — weaklings that have not sufficient confidence in their own moral purity to gaze upon a Greek statue — fancied that the volume was dangerous to public morality. The machinery of the criminal courts was invoked, and the publishers notified that they would be prosecuted if they continued to offer the book for sale. Governed by prudential business motives, the publishers yielded to the threat, and "Leaves of Grass" was withdrawn from the market. For a time the immaculate pouches of the United States mails were interdicted from carrying poems written by the author of "President Lincoln's Burial Hymn." In strong contrast with the narrowness exhibited by officials at Washington and Boston, stand out the earnest tributes of pure and religious men and women, and the encomiums of leaders of intellectual progress in Europe and America. In the meantime, "Leaves of Grass" continued to grow slowly but steadily in the minds of those whose judgment was of importance. The suppressed Boston edition was purchased and issued by a Philadelphia house, whose successors are the authorized publishers of Whitman's writings.

"Leaves of Grass," to be properly understood, must be considered in its entirety. It is the "poem of Walt Whitman;" Walt Whitman considered as a type of modern manhood, eating, drinking, loving, hating, working, dreaming, rejoicing, sorrowing, — coarse, but tender-hearted; rough, but simple-minded; devoutly sceptical; agnostically religious. Not only does he look into his own heart and write, but his work throbs with the very heart-beats of his singularly organized humanity. Neither accepting nor rejecting the past, he loves the



present and venerates the future. The past is to be regarded simply in its relation to the present and the future.

Upon the poets to come, the orators, singers, and musicians of the future, he depends for justification. Of this "new brood, native, athletic, continental," he is himself the forerunner, the indicator.

And in what lies the greatness of these songs of the New World? The author's ignoring of recognized models, so far from being a novelty, had been anticipated with varying degrees of failure from the beginning of the republic. The "distinctive nationalism" of this poet has been so frequently exploited, that critics have come to take it for granted. Yet, in some superficial respects, he is the least national of our poets. His defiance of public opinion, his exaltation of the individual, his mysticism, his contempt of mock modesty, his freedom from conventionalism, his scorn of the practical affairs of life, are certainly not national traits of the "divine average" that we are accustomed to meet with in "These States." He is hailed as the special bard of American democracy, and affects to transfer to his pages all phases of our democratic life — to present Americanism as it is. (In spite of his boasted realism, some of the most conspicuous features of our politics are ignored.) Nor is there any reason to overlook the fact that, long before the first appearance of the "Leaves," Emerson, Whittier, and Lowell had sung of ideal democracy in a manner that met with popular sympathy. Whitman's apostrophe to democracy,

"Sail, sail thy best, ship of Democracy!"

has been repeatedly quoted by his admirers as a new and striking conception, though the same thought had

been fully as well expressed by Longfellow twenty-three years earlier, in lines that have long since become hackneyed by frequent declamation. But according to the Whitmanian theory, "Longfellow yields only centos and distillations." Whitman's exaltation of self is extolled as the "key-note of democracy," as putting the matter in a new light. There is no evidence that Poe's assertion, "My whole nature utterly revolts at the idea that there is any being in the universe superior to *myself*," was familiar to Whitman.

But Whitman's disciples seem to regard his attitude towards self as a revelation never vouchsafed to poet before.

Passages in "Leaves of Grass" may be paralleled in Emerson's earlier writings, but Mr. Whitman's followers resent with indignation the suggestion of any indebtedness on their poet's part.

Not for a moment is it to be understood that Whitman is to be charged with imitation or even "unconscious cerebration." It is almost inevitable that similar thoughts of different thinkers should be expressed in similar language. But it is only fair to suggest that, besides those already referred to, many sentiments that are constantly held up to our admiration as purely and distinctively Whitman's had already found utterance among even the depreciated poets of our own land. Mr. Whitman himself, in his old age, displayed toward his brother singers a spirit of generous appreciation which it would be well for some of his disciples to emulate. He greeted Whittier as a poet, and conceded the merits of Bryant and Emerson. His short eulogy upon Longfellow was one of the best called forth by the elder poet's death. It is the constant and conscious straining after "nationalism" that militates

against the spontaneity of much of Whitman's work. His extensive cataloguing of inventions, of occupations, of geographical and political divisions, may serve a purpose in creating a vague sense of vastness, of multitudes, and of industrial prosperity. But not by such means is the spirit of Americanism to be caught and delineated. The most stimulating portions of Whitman's poems, those glowing with the light and warmth of true inspiration, are precisely those in which he forgets his self-imposed mission. It is when he gives free rein to his fancy and imagination that he attains to the great heights of song, above and independent of time and place. Then it is that his individuality, his "nationalism," if you will, is most true, because most spontaneous and most inartificial. His melodious chant, "The Mystic Trumpeter," for instance, is in some respects one of the greatest poems written in America. No one, after reading it, can rightfully accuse Whitman of always ignoring literary art. It is more of a rhapsody than a poem, beginning with a few simple notes, gradually rising to a higher key as the poet yields himself more and more to the divinely mysterious influence.

It is the spirit of the poet himself that responds to the breath of the divine trumpeter and vibrates with the sad notes of the feudal past, of love, and of war, of enslaved, oppressed humanity, "the wrongs of ages, baffled feuds and hatreds," and of man's struggle for redemption. In a powerful antistrophe the notes of sadness are suddenly turned to those of triumph as they attain a yet higher strain and are brought to a close in "a glad, exulting, culminating song."

To paraphrase the poet's own language, these poems are but leaves and roots, scents from the wild woods, and pond-side, "breezes of land and love set from living

shores" to those on "the living sea," frost-mellowed berries, early spring twigs and yet unfolded buds. To him who brings the warm sunshine of a sympathetic spirit they will open and bring form, color, and perfume, and become flowers, fruits, and trees. "The Song of the Broad-ax," amid much that is superfluous, fairly well represents the genius of our poet at its prime. Strong, elemental, grand is the sweep of this chant, imaginative, retrospective and prophetic, fitly according with the suggestions of an implement that has been so important a factor in the history of progress. The assonance of the opening lines, by the way, shows how natural to our poet are the ordinary ornaments of English verse, and may serve as a hint of the struggle that it cost him to emancipate himself from the fetters of conventional metre.

As if ashamed of being betrayed into anything like metrical formalism in his opening, the author gives us in the body of the piece some of probably the most extraordinary lines that ever disfigured a serious "song." The poet considered them essential to his purpose, however, and without such lines it would not be the representative song that it is. It is in the elemental grandeur of such poems as "Song of the Broad-ax," "Proud Music of the Storm," "Song of the Redwood Tree," "By Blue Ontario's Shore," "Song of the Open Road," and "Salut au Monde," that the poet's strength is shown. His simple graphic language is drawn from nature herself, from the sun, the air, the winds, and storms, the oceans and the prairies. Life, death, and man are his themes. Nature, in all her rugged, uncouth charms is his mistress, and he can see nothing in nature that is not pure, elevated, and devoid of evil.

Whitman's poetry of nature is distinct from that of

any other writer. It is true that he had read Wordsworth to advantage, but the nature spirit that whispers through the "Leaves of Grass" is thoroughly genuine. In reading Whitman we do not feel that we are reading his impressions of nature, so much as the very words of nature herself. In a poem written in his old age he refers to the great bards and their achievements, stately and beautiful. "These!" he exclaims, —

"These, O sea, all these I'd gladly barter,  
Would you the undulation of one wave, its trick  
to me transfer,  
Or breathe one breath of yours upon my verse,  
And leave its odor there."

Our poet has never been accused of false modesty in judging his own work, but in this instance he has, at least by implication, underestimated himself. As far as possible he has transferred to his pages not only the breath and odor of the sea, but the sighing of the breeze, the shadows of the forest, the impressiveness of the hills, the vastness of the rolling prairies, "the proud music of the storm," the glow of the "sun at noon refulgent," and the cooling airs of "tender and growing night." But under all the outward forms and signs of nature is the deeper spiritual meaning which the poet alone can interpret. In the wonderful dirge beginning, "Out of the cradle endlessly rocking," the poet beautifully illustrates this power.

The closing passages naturally suggest Poe. In fact, a critical essay might be written on the points of likeness and difference between the two poets, the one of gloom, the other of joy, as exemplified in "The Raven," and this lyric of the mocking-bird. Poe's messenger was a "bird or devil," bringing its tidings of utter despair. Whitman's was a "bird or demon,"

and his message of death, as finally interpreted by the sea, inspires the listener with the courage and comfort of hope.

Death has been a favorite topic among American versifiers ever since the days of the early Puritans, though nothing worthy of note was produced on the subject until the appearance of "Thanatopsis." But it was reserved for Whitman to deal with it in a way that was at once genuine and unconventional. Roaming in thought over the universe, as he says, he saw the "little that is good hastening toward Immortality," and the vast all that is called evil "hastening to merge itself and become lost and dead." He believed that everything has its appointed purpose, that each individual is an indispensable part of the universe. Excepting that in a certain sense evil "merges itself and becomes lost," there is no such thing as annihilation. In his cosmic economy there is a constant, continual progression; "there is no stoppage and can be no stoppage."

Though the "quicksand years" may whirl him he knows not whither, and all the schemes of life may fail, the self, the soul, the final substance must remain. Death, "the purport of all life," forms no exception to the rule that all things have been duly provided for. "I do not," he says, "think Life provides for all and for Time and Space, but I believe Heavenly Death provides for all."

With the mystery of God he dares not dally. Nor is he "curious about God," in whom he believes more than does "any priest." Everywhere and in all objects he sees something of God.

Whitman's religious faith and love were as instinctive in him as filial affection. "No man has ever yet

been half devout enough," he says; "none has yet adored or worshipped half enough."

As everything is of God, what we call evil, as one of the facts of existence, is as worthy of consideration as what we call good. This is a familiar doctrine, even in American literature.

Though he nowhere seeks to penetrate the impenetrable, Whitman places no limitations upon the actions of the human soul. He sings in the "Song of Myself" (1855):

"I am an acme of things accomplish'd, and an  
incloser of things to be,  
My feet strike an apex of the apices of the stairs;  
On every step bunches of ages, and larger  
bunches between the steps;  
All below duly travel'd and still I mount and  
mount.  
Rise after rise bow the phantoms behind me;  
Afar down I see the huge first Nothing — I know  
I was even there;  
I waited unseen and always, and slept through  
the lethargic mist,  
And took my time, and took no hurt from the  
fetid carbon."

Whitman was not the first to interpret poetically the teachings of modern science, but in the lines that follow the last quotation is the boldest recognition to be found in contemporary verse of the doctrine of evolution. Great scientific achievements, as represented at a New York exposition, or as typified in the opening of a new passage to India, appeal vividly to his imagination. The two poems suggested by those events are characteristic, — the one as the chant of triumphant democracy, the other as the hymnal of humanity at large. As Whitman is greater as a cosmic than as a

national poet, "Passage to India" is a nobler poem than his "Song of the Exposition."

As this new passage to India may be regarded as the link between primitive and modern civilizations, by a transition truly Whitmanian it is made to symbolize the connection between the unknown and the known.

As there are no material obstacles that cannot be overcome by modern science, so there is no spiritual barrier before which the soul should shrink in fear or doubt.

To the question as to what constitutes the greatness of Whitman's poetry, it is impossible to give a categorical answer. Different readers receive quite contradictory impressions. To my own mind the poet's chief characteristic is his elemental grandeur, as already noted. Subordinate to this may be mentioned his robust imagination, his love of nature, his humanity, his spirituality, his profound optimism, his virile strength, his courage, faith, and hope. He seems a universal rather than distinctively national poet. His greatest attributes have been shared by famous writers and thinkers before him, regardless of time or place. His attempts to transfer to his pages a reflection of his nation's material vastness has, it seems to me, proved a failure. His artificial formlessness has been successful only as a protest against an equally unnatural formalism, not as an example to be followed by others. His efforts to symbolize American life and aspirations resulted in depicting phases that for the most part were but fleeting and transitory. In one respect, however, his true Americanism happily manifests itself. This is his possession of the quality which he attributes to Lincoln as "a new virtue unknown to other lands, and hardly yet (1865) known here, but the foundation and



tie of all, as the future will grandly develop, *Unionism* in its truest and amplest sense." The bane of our best poetical literature, previous to Whitman, had been its localism. He broadly announces himself as the poet of the republic, and not of any section. The Missouri and the Columbia are to him as classic as the Hudson, the Merrimac, or the Charles. He recognizes the importance of all the agencies South and West, as well as North and East, that work to the upbuilding of the nation. As every individual is an indispensable factor in the universe, so in the State. The "love of comrades," the practical recognition of the brotherhood of man, is the base of politics as well as of metaphysics. The "city invincible" is the "new City of Friends." A "continent indissoluble" will be formed, and the "most splendid race" arrive when companionship is planted "thick as trees along the rivers of America, and along the shores of the Great Lakes, and all over the prairies." Only by the maintenance of such a disposition among all may true democracy be perpetuated. It is his Lincolnian "unionism," rather than certain eccentricities so misunderstood by foreign critics, that impresses Whitman's nationalism.

He was a strong, sane, healthful man, imaginative, original, self-absorbed, and convinced of the sacredness of his mission. Because he was imaginative, creative, aspiring, and felt within himself the harmonies of the universe, he was a poet. If he failed of unqualified success, he failed as the hero fails. "Battles are lost in the same spirit in which they are won" is one of his wisest sayings. But in his case the victories far outnumber the defeats.

With the period under review closes the golden era of American song. Though a very few of the singers

mentioned are at the present writing still with us, their life-work may be considered as virtually complete. With the new era beginning after the passions of the war had subsided in a half-decade of peace, another literature arose, adapted to the changed conditions. How far these later writers may permanently affect American letters, it is too early to estimate. I have assumed the most productive period as extending from the appearance of Longfellow's first volume of original verse in 1839 to the date of the publication of Bret Harte's first book of poems in 1870. The writings of some of the poets who flourished during that time antedate as others overlap this period, but the dates mentioned are significant as marking the appearance of two essentially distinct and influential forces in our literature. For after all the criticisms on Longfellow, he is still in general estimation the poet of America. As such, he is read and beloved at home, and honored and admired abroad. More original minds we have produced, but none so universally popular with high and low. He appealed to the common humanity of all, not the discriminating appreciation of an intellectual few. One who can do this, and still carry out high ideals, has the elements of greatness, if not absolutely great himself. As the most widely read American poet throughout the world, the first to raise American verse to the dignity of a far-reaching international fame, he may justly be said to have opened up a new era in our literature. In 1870 a new kind of realism was presented in the poems of the California writer, which, whether for good or for ill, whether permanent or transient, had a marked effect. In these thirty-one years nearly all the American poetry of lasting value yet written was produced. Politically it was the epoch

of conflict and of unrest. The clash of great ideas in matters of war and statesmanship, the ceaseless anti-slavery agitations, the rise and fall of attempted social reforms, the beginnings of great material and mechanical changes, the opening up of the golden West, — all these were profound educators, stimulating men's intellectual activities to the utmost. Americanism had grown to mean something more than patriotic platitudes. How long those whom we now regard as our greatest poets will live in the memory of men it is idle to speculate. But the true historian, looking back upon those times, will discern in these singers fit types of the higher aspirations, hopes, and ideals of intellectual America.

## CHAPTER XIV

### *THE AFTERMATH*

1870-1897

THE time-worn reproaches against American literature are, first, that it does not fully reflect American civilization, and second, that it is imitative and European, instead of being something unique and indigenous. The latter charge, it may be assumed, will continue to be made as long as Americans persist in speaking the English language, in adhering to the elementary principles of English jurisprudence, and developing a civilization sprung for the most part from English sources. Thought must be more or less influenced by language, custom, and what we call civilized society; and literature, as the expression of thought, must necessarily partake of its environment. The former charge, however, so frequently repeated, that our literature is not representatively American, is untrue. From the time of the first ballad by an American colonist in 1610, declaring, "We hope to found a nation where none before hath stood," up to the present day, the civilization and social life are fairly well represented in the literature, and especially the verse, of each period. If our literature was imitative, so was our civilization. The eras of settlement and colonization, of Indian wars, of the premonitory mutterings and trying ordeals of the Revolution, of the contest for nationality, of the development of the union, of the

long struggles for social and political reforms, of the Civil War and the principles involved, all may be traced in the verse of each successive generation, unreadable as much of that verse is to-day. Through all, it was characteristic of America as her career was steadily advancing.

Naturally enough, with a more firmly cemented union as a result of the subsidence of the war spirit, and in accord with the suggestions of the closing years of our first century as a nation, the sentiment of nationalism broadened and developed, and American literature ceased to be local. The new West, that had been forging ahead with its phenomenal growth, became an appreciative force in American letters. The South, awakening from its long literary lethargy, began to furnish, in a manner worthy of itself, its contributions of song and story as well as works of a more substantial character in the way of history and science. If in 1870 our younger writers failed to show the promise of their forerunners at a corresponding age, in the former generation the broad, national diffusion of the literary spirit was, in some degree, a compensation. Though Whitman for fifteen years had been protesting against over-refinement in literature, few heeded him. Yet there was undoubtedly an instinctive revulsion among the reading public against the prevailing superficial elegance; and our poets of realism, headed by Bret Harte, struck the popular fancy at once. It was fortunate for the Pacific coast that within its own territory could be found a genius capable of interpreting its poetic spirit. No fresher or more tempting field could offer itself than California, the land of semi-tropical luxuriance, of pure and tender skies, and unequalled scenic grandeur, with its memories of three

distinct civilizations within a generation; its dreamy traditions of a missionary past, so rudely terminated by the vanguard of a new order; its period of excitement, uproar, and confusion, of heroes, criminals, and all the conflicting elements of a new State; and finally its era of commonplace existence following railway construction that put it into touch with the rest of the world.

Francis Bret Harte, whose genius was quick to detect the latent romance of California life, was born at Albany, New York, but had been a resident of his adopted State almost from boyhood. While still a young man, he had undergone the vicissitudes of those of his class on "the coast," having engaged in school-teaching, journalism, politics, and practical mining. In 1868 he was selected editor of "The Overland Monthly" at San Francisco. The second number of that magazine contained his first prose sketch, "The Luck of Roaring Camp." In this and others that followed were disclosed the genius of artist and poet, though eminently respectable people could not decide whether to be pleased or shocked at the writer's "unnecessary truthfulness." He had been writing verse for years without attracting special notice, but when in 1870 he published in the September "Overland" his "Plain Language from Truthful James," his "Heathen Chinee" leaped into world-wide notoriety.

The best of Harte's work as a poet belongs to a single decade, and he has wisely confined his labors of late years to prose. His strength is in his character sketches. As a novelist or poet of ordinary sentiment, he is hardly above mediocrity. He is master of a terse, vigorous, dramatic style, adapted to the short story in prose, and to lyric and ballad verse. Outside

of his peculiar field he is conventional and imitative. Only his flashes of humor, as in "The Aged Stranger," relieve his verse, not distinctively Western, of the charge of being commonplace. Because he was the first poet to reproduce in its true spirit a vanished life, his ballads of Spanish California, northern Mexico, and the California of early mining days, deserved the hearty welcome they received. Many of these, slight as they are, are flash-light photographs, in which passing and past phases of American life have been caught and preserved. They deserve the name of poetry because they are true to life and to nature, reflecting the passions and aspirations, however uncouthly, of the crude humanity that was the forerunner of more refined society.

In his verse, as in his prose, our author has presented life as he found it. His aim, as he frankly admits, has been that of an artist, not that of a moralist. However much we may quarrel with his art, we end by acknowledging its fascination. His poetic powers appear in his prose sketches to better advantage than in his verse. His worst prose, so far as form is concerned, is more graceful than his attempts to depict frontier characters in ancient classical metres. Nor is there any apparent reason for preserving in permanent form many of his frivolous and flippant efforts, of which "The Aspiring Miss DeLaine" may be taken as a type. In spite of his disclaimer as to being a moralist, moreover, Harte is not exempt from the American literary fault of didacticism which forms the burden, in a double sense, of otherwise unexceptionable works.

Bret Harte's unconventionalism is one of his chief merits. The same class of critics who found fault

with the metrical forms of "Evangeline" and "Hiawatha," with the dialect and homespun wit of "The Biglow Papers," with the idealism of Emerson, and the general attitude of Whitman, all because not based upon stereotyped models, objected to the realism and frankness of the California author. But the latter has outlived his critics and justified his own course. His success naturally inspired hordes of imitators. The former solitary pioneer, in his chosen province, is now hailed as a leader and originator. What was heresy in his initiative efforts has become a widely-accepted fashion, and the "Bret Harte school of poetry" is one of the features of the nineteenth-century literature.

A strong voice was added when the singer of "Pike County Ballads" appeared. John Hay, of nearly the same age as Bret Harte, had the advantage of a very different training. Born at Salem, Indiana, in 1838, he graduated at Brown University, and was admitted to the Illinois bar. His collegiate and professional studies and subsequent experience as private Secretary to President Lincoln, officer in the army, secretary of the legation at Paris, *chargé d'affaires* at Vienna, and secretary of legation at Madrid, would seem a strange sort of preparation for a literary career which in popular judgment was to culminate in the creation of "Little Breeches" and "Jim Bludsoe." The era of dialect and frontier poetry had set in when Mr. Hay returned to America from Spain. It was perhaps as a relief to the poetical atmosphere of "Castilian Days" that he yielded to the current demand for something strong and unconventional. His heroes, like those of Bret Harte, show the elemental virtues, gratitude, courage, and self-sacrifice beneath coarsest exteriors.



It has always seemed a pity that Mr. Hay has not more fully developed his peculiar gifts. His wit and sarcasm indicate rare satiric powers. He is never imitative, even when dealing with familiar subjects. His long residence abroad has tinged some of his verse with a transatlantic color, but his Americanism is always apparent.

In 1871 the West certainly had no cause to complain of neglect by the literary world. To the life-like realism of Bret Harte and John Hay was opposed the florid unrealism of another frontier poet. Cincinnati Heine Miller was born in Indiana in 1841. In his thirteenth year he removed with his parents to Oregon, and early assimilated himself to the life of the Pacific coast. Few poets have been so fortunate in obtaining a ready audience. Once more the English critics announced the discovery of "the greatest American poet," — an announcement that had lost much of its novelty through frequent repetition during three generations of American verse-writers. Mr. Miller's sense of humor must have been appealed to more than once when he found himself regarded in England as a rare curiosity, the literary expression, as it were, of the "Americanism" fondly supposed to be reflected in the Wild West shows of "Buffalo Bill." His English admirers, however, were disposed to take his alleged eccentricities seriously, and it is not surprising that sundry fables should have gathered about his life in the West and in the British capital, which for many years he allowed to pass unchallenged.

"Poetry with me is a passion which defies reason," he says in the preface to the first edition of his "Songs," a statement which few readers will be inclined to dispute. We could put up with the passion-

ate, unrestrained flow of utterance, his exuberance of metaphor, and his gorgeous descriptions of nature, and of men and women the like of whom never lived. His chief fault is lack of originality, of creative power. His whole plan of transporting Byronic heroes and heroines to a virgin soil is but a reminder of those dreary days of American doggerel, fifty years before Mr. Miller's appearance, when the Indian and the settler were supposed to give an "American" coloring to transplanted Byronism and its predecessor, Della Cruscanism. Even Mr. W. M. Rossetti is forced to admit that "excitement and ambition" are the "twin geniuses of Mr. Miller's poetical character."

Brushing aside his imitativeness, his false rhetoric, his stale platitudes, his frequently defective versification, bad grammar, and tawdry taste, there still remains enough to entitle Mr. Miller to an honorable rank among our poets. He knows how to interest his readers, and can tell a story well. The plots are almost always old, but in his best tales, as in "The Arizonian" and "Isles of the Amazons," there is enough of his own to redeem their overflowing faults.

As descriptions of Western character, Mr. Miller's poems are worthless. His heroes and heroines are not typically Western, much less typically American. As individuals, they are the tawdriest shams that ever glittered with tin swords and tinsel armor on the melodramatic stage. The broad, free play of his fancy is least imitative when dealing with the titanic grandeur of Western scenery. For this reason his "By the Sun-Down Seas" is the most original though the least sensational of all his more ambitious work.

But such affectations as "Aridzone," "Arizit," and "Czar of Rusk," as well as his confused metaphors

and cockney rhetoric, must be taken as integral parts of the poet's impulsive individuality, which, after all, is a phenomenal blending of the true and the false. He has wisely ignored the advice of critics, has written as the inspiration seized him, and poured forth his whole soul in his verse, without much regard to literary or other proprieties. He has given us no new, strong, human characterization. We care little for the unnatural men and women whom he poses in the "phosphorescent light" of his grewsome fancies. But we confess the contagion of his enthusiasm when he describes the white-topped peaks that stretch from "bleak Alaska" to Darien, like "a line of battle tents in everlasting snow." These are "the stern and proud patrician fathers of the land" that he loves and makes his readers love. Of the grandeur of these mountains, the twilight gloom of awe-inspiring cañons, the music of the streams, the vastness of the "voiceless plains" and shoreless deserts, he has sung as no other poet has ever dared to do. For doing this, in the spirit that he has done it, he is deserving of admiration. This it is that constitutes his real Americanism. It is significant also that Mr. Miller's lyric on Columbus represents the highest poetic expression evoked by our quadri-centennial.

These writers may be regarded as the founders of a rapidly increasing class whose works are contributing so much to a strong and healthful Western literature. It would be improper to take leave of these frontier singers without referring to one who, if so inclined, might have made the Rocky Mountains as familiar in song as the Sierras have become in the works of his contemporaries. Eugene Field (1850-1895), at one time regarded as the Bret Harte of Colorado, was born

in Missouri, and had been a resident of New England as well as of the far West. But his literary development properly belongs to the last-named section, which he abandoned to assume a position on a Chicago newspaper. Colorado and the Rocky Mountain region still claim him as their own, and he never entirely renounced his first allegiance. In his humorous descriptions of life in the mining camps in the early sixties, we recognize Field as the cleverest of Bret Harte's disciples, but in such lyrics as "The Wanderer," "Little Boy Blue," "Telka," and "The Bibliomaniac's Prayer," we gladly hail Field as his own master.

The literary awakening had its effect in the "middle West," as we have seen in the production of "Pike County Ballads," the most widely read poems of life in the Mississippi region that up to that time had been written. But the whole country seemed affected by the growing nationalization of our literature. Ohio was among the first to respond to this postbellum spirit. As early as 1869 the "Western Windows" of John James Piatt had shown how the life of that section could be converted to the uses of sincere poetry. The truth to nature and to life shown in Mr. Piatt's lyrics and idyls of the Ohio Valley (1869, 1871, and 1879), places their author among the foremost ranks of our later writers. Loyal to his art, he has achieved success by a manly sincerity that scorns all adventitious aids in the forms of sensational mannerisms and pseudo-dialect so tiresomely characteristic of much of our recent literature.

The genius of poets of the interior has not made the streams of the Mississippi Valley as classic or romantic as the Hudson or the Merrimac. Neither the Mississippi nor the Ohio has been sung appropriately

by local writers. Maurice Thompson has given us some good lines on the Wabash; William O. Stoddard has celebrated the sluggish Arkansas, and William H. Venable gave us in 1871 his "June on the Miami," a poem of much promise, not excelled by any of its author's later work. Our great inland lakes have inspired no such poetry as have the mountains of the Pacific coast. The best poetry of the prairies has come from the East.

The verse of the interior is for the most part confined to scenes and suggestions of domestic life. There is little poetry in the ballads and legends of Will Carleton, who by birth and training may be said to belong to the middle West. But the tender sentimentality with which they treat commonplace subjects appealed to a wide constituency not at all inclined to be critical.

The one singer who seems at present to eclipse in public favor all other poets of his section is the youngest yet considered in these pages. James Whitcomb Riley was born at Greenfield, Indiana, in 1853. After a varied career in keeping with the unconventional turn of his mind, he found himself becoming famous as a local poet under the name of "Benjamin F. Johnson of Boone." The patois in which most of his lyrics were composed, and which, for the sake of convenience, has been called "The Hoosier Dialect," has led many to regard him as the most typically American of our younger poets. But in many respects he is the most artificial of our more conspicuous singers of this realistic era. As in the case of Whitman, his gravest faults appear on the surface. More especially in his earlier poems there is a constant striving for effect, as though depending upon eccentricity rather than merit to attract

attention. This impression is increased by an obtrusive simplicity, savoring more of art than of nature, and by a resort to adventitious aids depending largely upon the mechanical art of the printer. The success with which this style has been imitated by unimaginative verse-writers is an indication of its artificiality. But in spite of his affectations and questionable methods, the true spirit is present. Riley has not yet proved himself the Burns or Whittier of the interior, and perhaps has no ambition to be considered a follower of either. But more than any other poet between the Alleghanies and the Sierras he has succeeded in idealizing in the popular mind the every-day life of inland America. Others have attempted the same thing on a higher key, and have won more applause from the critics, but Riley's songs have gone straight home to the hearts of the people. The life that he portrays he knows, not so much from observation as from actual participation.

Like the great majority of our later poets, Riley is a confirmed sentimentalist. If he were not, he would not be so popular with Americans, in some respects the most sentimental of contemporary people. But beneath all his emotionalism there is a vigorous, manly tone that rings with the notes of a sturdy, far-reaching democracy. The sense of human brotherhood is ever present with him. In the ordinary and the commonplace he can detect the germs of a true nobility. No fellow-being is too humble for his sympathy.

It is no reproach to Riley that he is the poet of heart rather than of the soul, of sentiment rather than conviction. We look in vain for that subtle insight that charms us in Whittier's "My Playmate" and "In School Days." On the other hand, Riley

has a far keener appreciation of humor and a more delicate musical sense than the New England poet, so that his verse is rarely open to the charge of prosiness.

Mr. Riley has honorably resisted the temptations that beset a truly musical singer. He has amusingly proved that he might have echoed Poe for a short time and then have been forgotten. In painting the prospect from his own door, he has chosen the wiser course, for though this prospect may sometimes seem spiritualized through the medium of his exuberant fancy, it is none the less acceptable. He has caught the gentler aspect of his prosaic surroundings, and shown that there is a poetic side even to the hard conditions of rural life in that section. If the "green fields and running brooks" of Indiana are wanting in the picturesqueness of the rocky sea-coast and roaring brooks of New England, or the gloomy cañons and snow-capped peaks of the far West, it is not the fault of that State's most eminent poet.

The new literary movement in the middle West is encouraging. By whatever name we call it, realism or veritism or localism, the new tendency is, in principle, a development that makes for truth. It has wisely taken as its motto: "Provincialism is no ban to a truly national literature." We gladly hail its chief exponent as a living, active force in the world of letters, who can bravely discard the "crumbling idols" of the past, and advocate principles which, being alive, can impart life. It is well to remind ourselves that American literature did not die with the New England writers, any more than English literature died with the Elizabethan age. Dead indeed must be the literary spirit that reflects only the thoughts and sen-

timents of the past. The danger of this recent tendency is the one common to all such efforts. The history of American literature is full of warnings, if we will but heed them. The determination to create a truly national literature has been the bane of many writers since Revolutionary days, and the result has been most depressing. This latter effort to institute a "Western literature," distinct from the Eastern, is fraught with the same peril. The purpose becomes so painfully obvious that spontaneity is lost.

We hear a great deal in these days about "local color," but after the last word has been spoken on the subject, we are still confronted with world-old principles. It may be assumed that all great writers have reflected the spirit of their own age, but unless they did more than that, they would never have survived their own generation. Because they troubled themselves little about local color, and represented the universal thoughts, aspirations, and feelings of humanity, because, in a word, they thought more of the eternal verities than of transient veritism, their works have always appealed to the best that there is in human nature. All the coldness attributed to classic art has not shorn it of its real beauty. The silent messages that are borne down the centuries serve to stimulate the genius of to-day. True art is independent of time or place. This stale truism seems likely to be lost sight of by those who are constantly clamoring for something that will be distinctly different from, though not necessarily better than, what has been produced in the East. Old ideals, we are told, are but figures of speech. "As a matter of fact," we are assured, "they are being worn away. An impalpable sand, blown upon them by ceaseless winds from free spaces, has worn them down; their blurred features



wear a look of vague appeal. They are no longer as gods." Yet we doubt if the sane judgment of the American people at the end of the nineteenth century finds more real satisfaction in the hackneyed sentimentalism of "The Old Homestead" and "Blue Jeans" than in the alleged romanticism of Hamlet or Antigone.

Strained efforts to accomplish "something different from the past," have never resulted in genuine creation. The local literature of the great interior will come spontaneously, and not as a result of preconcerted effort. The light of truth that has penetrated the dark shadows of the world will continue to glow, regardless of theories or prejudices. Neither radical nor conservative, it makes itself felt, because in its very essence it is irresistible.

The cause of localism should be sufficient to stand alone, yet our Western veritists have seen fit to ally themselves with impressionists in art, and are making common cause. In discarding everything that is suggestive of Eastern Americanism, they do not hesitate to applaud the latest methods of European impressionism. Hamlin Garland, whose words have already been quoted, may justly be regarded as typifying the consummate flowering of Western veritism. Mr. Garland's genius deserves nothing but praise, for he is certainly one of the most original and creative of our younger writers. His attractive volumes should convince the most sceptical that American literature still keeps pace with material development. Yet, when he attempts to graft continental impressionism upon American methods, he seems to be taking a step backward.

Of late we are hearing less of Western or Southern or Eastern literature as such. At the same time it is gratifying to note the steady if somewhat tardy growth of

the literary spirit in the middle West. When we consider what has already been contributed by that section, and the promise disclosed by younger writers who have come into prominence during the last decade of the century, we realize that in the West there is something deeper, if less obtrusive, than her material prosperity.

If the gods are well pleased when they see great minds contending with adversity, the experience of the South after the war must have furnished much satisfaction to high Olympus. It is no wonder that sadness is the keynote of Southern song as echoed in the strains of Hayne, Timrod, and Ryan. Far different from the self-reliant, vigorous tone of the West, as reflected in its literature, was the spirit of the new South, weighed down by heritage of woe, but still bravely breathing its notes of hope and cheer. Clear and pure came the strains of that musical singer, whose brief but courageous life is one of the saddest, as it is one of the most inspiring, in the history of our literature. Sidney Lanier (1842-1881) was born at Macon, Georgia, graduated at Oglethorpe College in 1860, served in the Confederate army, was taken prisoner, and released after five months of confinement. For many years he was an invalid, but up to the end battled bravely with adverse fate. His poem "Corn" in Lippincott's Magazine for February, 1875, compelled the first recognition of his merits. There was, perhaps, a suggestion of Timrod's "Cotton Boll," but the poem was representatively Southern. Lanier was the antithesis of Whitman. Each had decided notions on the mechanism of verse, and each in his way was a reformer and reactionist. It would perhaps have been better for Lanier's poetic fame if he had been less of a musician and more of an artist in the broadest sense.

Lanier's "Hymns of the Marshes" may be pronounced the highest expression of our native Southern song, with the possible exception of some of Hayne's best lyrics. Such seductive music, such beauties of description, such aptly chosen words are not common in our later literature. As in the case of Poe, Lanier's whole organization seemed attuned to harmony, though he had the advantage in a more profound conception of musical laws. The human element, so lacking in Poe, is conspicuous in the younger singer. His sympathies went forth to the poor and ill paid. He scorned the doctrine that human labor is a commodity to be adjusted by purely economic laws. He felt, as others before him have felt, how miserably false is the decree that makes human creatures' lives depend on the pitiless laws of trade. He was as thorough a democrat as Walt Whitman, though his ideal was very different. The physical was subordinated entirely to the spiritual.

"My democrat [he wrote], the democrat whom I contemplate with pleasure, the democrat who is to write or read the poetry of the future, may have a mere thread for his biceps, yet he shall be strong enough to handle hell; he shall play ball with the earth; and albeit his stature may be no more than a boy's, he shall still be taller than the great redwoods of California; his height shall be the height of great resolution, and love, and faith, and beauty, and knowledge, and subtle meditation; his head shall be forever among the stars."

Such intellectually was the young Southerner. His heights were those named, and though his head was among the stars, he kept a steady foothold upon the earth. Physically prostrated, he carried out his life work from the "height of great resolution." Discouragements attended him, but with a promethean spirit he met and defied them. Dying in his thirty-ninth year,

he left much that was incomplete. His small volume of verse is but the pedestal of the fair monument he had hoped to rear; but even this is sufficient to show the keen sense of beauty, the refined taste, and the creative genius of a true poet.

In turning from Lanier to Maurice Thompson,<sup>1</sup> we find a poet equally representative of the South. It is the joyous out-door life of the South, the songs of Southern birds, the breezes from Southern lakes and bayous, the fragrance of Southern blooms that vivify the "Songs of Fair Weather" and later poems of this author, who in spite of his present residence is to be considered a Southern writer. Like a true Southron, he is an enthusiastic sportsman. Diana is the subject of his most picturesque poems, and the bow, gun, and reel figure in his best lyrics. He is master of a direct, straightforward diction that charms by its simplicity. In one of his prose essays, he refers to the irresistible force with which grand men assert themselves, "without noise, or contortion, or bluster,—a steadfast eye, a calm face, a quiet manner, an even voice." It is this impression of reserved strength which imparts force to his own writings. His language is that of a high-bred scholar,—of one who without being in the least obtrusive, or self-assertive, makes his words and thoughts sink deep into the reader's or hearer's mind. He is moreover emphatically the poet of the New South.

Professor J. W. Davidson, in his "Living Writers of the South" (1869), mentions the names of no less than two hundred and forty-one writers as belonging to that section. Of these, one hundred and twelve are classified as writers of verse. "Some of the writers," in the estimation of the editor, "have talents and

<sup>1</sup> 1844-1901.

character, with corresponding results, which enable them to stand in the front rank of American authorship. Some have limited abilities, and some have none." It is safe to predict that not half-a-dozen of these hundred and twelve verse-writers living in 1869 will be generally remembered at the end of the century. Among the few whose works deserve to live, should be mentioned the gifted woman who has rightly been called the "greatest Southern poetess," Mrs. Margaret (Junkin) Preston.

During, or shortly after, the war, Mrs. Preston wrote her "Beechenbrook, a Rhyme of the War." The book is little read now, perhaps never was much read in the North, but is deservedly regarded as one of the best poetical contributions to war literature from the Southern side. When, in 1870, her "Old Songs and New" appeared, there was evidence of a firmer touch, a deeper, more original line of thought than was promised in her earlier volume. Her powers showed to still better advantage in her "Cartoons," published in 1875. It is the poems in this book that entitle her to the distinction of being the leading poetess of her section. The Old Masters, ancient legends, and modern events, form the subject-matter of these admirably wrought "cartoons." There is an elevated tone, an artistic, poetic atmosphere, a wealth of suggestion about these poems that makes each a study. Without an appearance of didacticism, there is underlying each some profound lesson, some subtle thought, some wise philosophy. Though a true adopted daughter of the South, she is too broadly American to be provincial. It must be conceded that in her home poetry she has fallen short of seizing and portraying the truly sensuous, Southern environment that marks "Down the

Bayou, and other Poems" of her sister singer, Mrs. Mary Ashley Townsend.

The South has not been behind the Pacific coast and the middle West in purely local contributions. Irwin Russell (1853-1879) and Joel Chandler Harris may be considered pioneers in this now well-worn field. Younger writers born during the latter half of the century have presented the lighter and more humorous side of Southern life and character in their dialect tales and poems.

Significantly enough, Walt Whitman's theory that the true union of the States is to be brought about by the poets is receiving some verification at the South. Among all the recent Southern writers of the higher class this trait of unionism is conspicuous. A conqueror may easily forgive, but it is quite another matter for the conquered to forget. If the great philosopher of antiquity could have foreseen these unpretending rhymesters like Hayne, Lanier, Thompson, and later Southern writers struggling against fearful odds, resolutely looking forward and not back, working in their own way for the development of a true and far-reaching nationalism, he might have reversed the judgment that excluded poets from the ideal republic. As the spirit of song at the North was one of the most potent agents in arousing Americans to the realization of a great wrong, so in the succeeding generation, both at the North and the South, it has been one of the influential causes toward reconciliation and concord between the sections.

During the period to which this chapter is devoted, New England and the Middle States, while not retaining exclusive prominence in American letters, have not forfeited the leadership. In spite of the diffusion of

the literary spirit, New York and Boston continue to be our literary centres as fully as when Bryant and Longfellow were in their prime. Among those whose careers connect the golden era of American song with the present realistic period, Edmund C. Stedman is easily foremost. Born at Hartford in 1833, he inherited his intellectual traits from a distinguished New England ancestry, but more directly from his mother, who is still remembered as the author of several volumes of verse.

As correspondent at the front for a New York journal, Stedman saw much of the horrors and excitement of war. His "Alice of Monmouth, an Idyl of the Great War" (1864), reads as if struck off at white heat. In spite of imperfections, it remains, with its strength of contrasts, its glowing descriptions, its vigorous, stirring action, the best narrative poem written contemporaneously with the events of the war. The man who could give us such work as this "Idyl" had no business dallying with imitative verse. The young poet had cut loose the leading strings of Tennyson and Hood, and had begun to walk alone. But it was not until 1869 that Stedman's most finished poem appeared. "The Blameless Prince" is not altogether pleasing, but it is strong, graphic, and pathetic, and told with a poetic grace and power that moves to its climax with all the stateliness and all the fatality of a Grecian tragedy.

One who can so well sound the spiritual depths can hardly be expected to fathom all the mysteries of creation. If Stedman has not been successful as an out-door poet, it is not because the artificialities of city life appeal to him more strongly than fresh fields, ocean waves, or mountain breezes, but because he is

more than all a poet of humanity. The human heart and soul are as much part of the broad economy of nature as are the songs of birds, changes of seasons, or the elemental features of land, sea, and sky, and in this sense Nature has no truer poet among us than the author of "The Blameless Prince."

Though of strong classic tastes, Stedman is pre-eminently a poet of his own era. He is in accord with his age, and therefore its fit interpreter. As a result, perhaps, of his journalistic life, he seems to have the faculty of noting down and appropriately celebrating current events. His "occasional" poems are by no means ephemeral. As a poet-patriot he sings us his "Cavalry Song;" as poet-banker, he discovers "Pan in Wall Street," and as poet-scholar brings us "News from Olympia." But whatever he tells is worth listening to.

Even more than for his attractive verse, American literature is indebted to Mr. Stedman for his prose essays on contemporary poets and the nature of poetry in general. He is our foremost living critic and man of letters. In his "Victorian Poets" (1875) he was one of the first to discuss the true relations between modern science and verse, and to discern that there need be no irreconcilable warfare, though the "temporary struggle" had "seriously embarrassed the poets of the era." He predicted that poetry would not be able fully to avail herself of the aid of science until her votaries should "cease to be dazed by the possession of a new sense." Slowly this great truth has made its way, as illustrated by recent literature. It is well that in the dying years of this utilitarian century there should come from America this clear and manly voice in favor of great ideals. However changing the



fashions of popular verse, behind it all the spirit of truth and beauty remains essentially unchanged. As the voice of man's inmost soul, poetry can no more be banished from life than the light of stars from the sky. This poet-critic considers poetry the voice not of the past alone, but of the future as well; that it will continue "the expression of the manner in which revealed truths and truths as yet unseen, but guessed and felt, affect the emotions and thus sway man's soul;" that modern science, instead of annihilating the spirit of song, will open up new and broader vistas. It is this serene optimism that has characterized Mr. Stedman through life. Though he has long since ceased to be included in the list of "our younger poets," the spirit of his writings is so fresh and buoyant that it seems impossible to think of him as growing old. To his readers he is and always will be the poet of youth, hope, and good cheer.

The year 1855 is memorable as ushering in the initial volumes of two poets representing the two extremes of American verse, the one to be greeted by Emerson as "at the beginning of a great career, which yet must have had a long foreground somewhere for such a start;" the other to be commended, though somewhat later, by the elder Hawthorne for the "rich, sweet, and imaginative" strains, that have continued to please so large a range of readers. Whitman's "Leaves of Grass," the matured work of a man of thirty-six was published in the same year with T. B. Aldrich's "The Bells," the unripe product of a youth of nineteen. The elder fondly believed that his book would revolutionize the literary world; the younger thought so little of his performance that he has since repudiated it as well as some of his later works.

In following his own advice and letting his art be "all in all," Aldrich has undoubtedly sacrificed strength. He makes no pretension to profound thought or deep wisdom. His best poems are suggestions, hints; strong in what they leave unsaid, and most imaginative when stimulating the imagination of the reader. Like Taylor and Stoddard he made early excursions in Orientalism, for which his vivid fancy and fervid language well adapted him. His sonnets are among the most perfect in modern English. His lyrics have the faculty of singing themselves and clinging to the memory. More than any other of our living verse-writers he understands the use of that much abused expression, "word-painting." He is lavish with his phrases, and most skilful in their selection. It is perhaps inevitable that such a cunning-artist should be guilty of mannerisms. The profusion of azure, damask, emerald, and gold palls upon one. Amid a superabundance of musk, aloes, and myrrh, moonshine, roses, and violets, one longs for the tonic effects of sunshine and pure, fresh air. When our poet sings of nature, it is that of the greenhouse, or as seen from the drawing-room window.

Aldrich is a master in the art of surprise. It is this that has made his prose tales famous even in several continental languages. "Corydon" is "Margery Daw" in poetic miniature. The great defect of both his prose and verse is a proneness to sentimentalism which reaches its climax in his prose tale "Quite So." On the other hand, that he can write strong, nervous verse is apparent in his sonnets "Fredericksburg," "Egypt," and "By the Potomac," as well as in some passages in "Spring in New England," "Judith," and "Wyndham Towers." Reference has been made to the unrelenting self-criticism which has enabled him to discard or revise

much of his work. Even more conspicuous is the steady, well proportioned development of his poetic genius. His best work has been done in the latter half of his long literary career. In his later poems there is less of moonshine, roses, and violets, and more of human life, thought, and feeling. "Mercedes" (1884) shows strong dramatic talent. "Wyndham Towers" (1889) has been pronounced by a competent critic, Mr. F. D. Sherman, "the most artistically finished piece of blank verse that has been written in this country." This seems a sweeping assertion, but so far as relates to our narrative poems in unrhymed pentameter it is probably true. Neither Bryant's "Sella" nor Taylor's "Lars," as a work of art, can be compared with it in sonorous, Tennysonian melody, simple yet elevated diction, and adherence to artistic proprieties. It is suffused with the atmosphere of the Elizabethan age, in spite of the occurrence of such a line as —

"But boyish hope to footing find at Court."

In Aldrich's volume, "The Sisters' Tragedy, and other Poems" (1890), will be found some of his strongest and subtlest writing. Yet after all that may be said of the poet's growth, one instinctively turns to his earlier lyrics and sonnets for that perfection in detail which places the author of "Wedded," "Tiger Lilies," "Identity," and "Pursuit and Possession" at the head of his kind, if not in a niche peculiarly his own.

"We shall never have a poetry of our own till we get over this absurd reluctance from facts, till we make the ideal embrace and include the real, till we consent to face the music in our simple common names, and put Smith into a lyric, and Jones into a tragedy." These words, which Mr. Howells puts in the mouth

of one of his characters, were written in 1871, when the revolt of our realists was beginning to make itself felt, and are significant as foreshadowing his own theories. It cannot be claimed that he has carried out his views to their logical fulfilment in his verse, because he chose to abandon his poetic career before he was fairly on the way. He evidently believed prose to be his proper form of expression, and few of his readers will quarrel with him on that account. As the oldest of our writers born West of the Alleghanies to achieve so great a fame, and descended from a not remote Welsh ancestry, he literally, as well as figuratively, infused new blood into our literature. The only important memorials of his poetic career are the volumes published in 1873 and 1894. Yet there is sufficient to show some of the traits that have secured fame for his novels. Many of his shorter pieces have all the finish and suggestiveness of Aldrich's best work. As far as he went, especially in "Avery" and in his hexameter poems, he succeeded in making "the ideal embrace and include the real." But through them all is a vein of graceful fancy not generally associated with notions of modern realism.

The success of Mr. Howells in a different branch of literature has diverted attention from his verse. He has been true to his own talents in preferring to be an eminent novelist rather than a minor poet. As the exponent of the "finer art of our day," he stands unrivalled among his countrymen, and may well afford to regard with indifference his waning fame as a verse writer.

John T. Trowbridge, a native of western New York, is another poet whose prose has overshadowed his verse. Twelve years older than Bret Harte, and

early known as author of "The Vagabonds," he may be considered a pioneer of the realistic school in America. He has given us some faithful reproductions of certain light and dark sides of American character. "The Emigrant's Story" (1874) is written in the metre which our verse writers at one time labored so diligently to naturalize in our verse. It is to be regretted that they were not more successful, for Longfellow has proved how well adapted it is to narrative poetry. But the efforts of Stedman, Howells, Harte, Taylor, and Trowbridge have not resulted in popularizing the English hexameter. The dialect poem of "Old Simon Dole" is a strong character sketch. It is the autobiographical story of a hard, thrifty, and utterly selfish farmer, a type of character ignored by the sentimentalists, who see only the poetic side of rural life. Only such authors as Mrs. Cooke, Trowbridge, and Hamlin Garland have done the subject justice.

A lively fancy, truth to nature, and a wholesome out-door spirit characterize the best of Trowbridge's poetry. The fidelity with which he has painted certain small-minded, hardened creatures does not blind him to the brighter and more attractive side. "The Emigrant," with his honest toiling, his restless energy, and devotion to wife and family, is a better, more common, though not less real, type of American than the serenely selfish Simon Dole. It may be mentioned also that this realistic poet has sung true and beautiful lyrics of country life.

Among the few living poets who have preserved the traditions of the elder day is William Winter, whose essays in dramatic criticism hold high rank. Born in Massachusetts in the same year with Aldrich, his literary career may be said to be almost identical

in duration. His first book of poems was published when he was but eighteen. Like Aldrich, he has rejected much of his earlier work, consenting to rest his reputation as a poet on his volume published in 1880 and revised in 1888. Poetry with him, as he expresses it, has been experienced "as a feeling, not pursued as a design," though it has been "the main motive and object of his mental activity." He prefers the old school of English lyrical poetry, "of which gentleness is the soul and simplicity the garment." It is for this gentleness and simplicity rather than for any rare degree of originality or force that his verse is noted. As was to be expected from one of such critical insight, his technical execution is almost faultless. As a lyric poet, he may be classed with Poe in melancholy music and ease of versification. Both "Orgia" and "Erebus" might have been written by the earlier poet without in the least detracting from his fame.

An echo of Dantean mysticism, which found utterance in the impassioned strains of "Vita Nuova," may be discerned in the writings of a New York poet, who is still in perfect accord with his age. In 1875 Mr. Richard Watson Gilder published his little volume, "The New Day," which has been considered the poetic expression of his "young life." He calls it "a poem in songs and sonnets." The general reader, not possessing the inclination to study deeply between the lines or to attempt the elucidation of certain obscurities, will find in this work a series of exquisitely written love-poems, interspersed with songs, odes, and "interludes," whose connection with the main subject is not always apparent. The poet, like his model, appeals —

"To every captive soul and gentle heart."

It is not surprising that he should be misunderstood, or, except by a few, not understood at all. He wanders in the highest realms of spiritual poetry, whither in these days not many care to follow. When he descends to solid earth he gives us lines full of force and masculine vigor. In its striking beauty of expression, dreamy mysticism, and faultless melody, "The New Day" differs from anything produced among us during the present period. In 1894 Mr. Gilder published, under the title of "Five Books of Song," a collective edition of his verse, which, until he has produced something more important, may be regarded as his representative work. Behind the veil of allegory that obscures his verse shines the spirit of beauty, pure and translucent. Like his "morning that comes singing o'er the sea," he illumines and irradiates the dark chambers of death, pain, and sorrow, teaching the way "that leads from darkness to the perfect day." Devoutly religious, he discerns in the creative poet an inspiration to heroism, an insight that anticipated science, a spark of the divinity that creates worlds and suffuses the actions of universal laws with the light of universal love. But he betrays neither an undue sentimentalism nor an overwrought didacticism. It is impossible that such strains should strike the popular fancy, and the poet himself is probably content to be accepted by the few.

New York society has a representative novelist in Edgar Fawcett. It would be a trite criticism to say that his versatility as novelist, dramatist, essayist, satirist, and poet, has detracted from absolute excellence in any one direction. The vast improvement of his later upon his earlier work is at least a hint of what he might have accomplished if he had confined his

talents to higher literature. His "Romance and Reverie" (1886) showed such a decided advance over his previous efforts as at once to place him in the front rank of our contemporary versifiers. His poetry evinces a remarkably vivid fancy and occasional mysticism, but even his best work betrays his characteristic weakness, a strained effort to say something startling. His exasperatingly frequent use of the exclamation point seems only to emphasize his obvious attempts to astonish. He has published some of the best social satires that have appeared in recent years.

With the examples of early American poets before him, it required more than ordinary faith and courage on the part of Charles DeKay to revive orientalism in verse. In his "Vision of Nimrod" (1881) and "Vision of Esther" (1882), this poet has undertaken, while dealing in scenes and actors of a far-off land and time, to "aim at problems of the West to-day." The evolution of life and the correlation of races are the ambitious themes suggested by these two volumes. There are admirable descriptive passages, but it is sufficient to refer to the modern thought disguised under ancient conditions, and a certain mystic idealism, without dwelling unnecessarily on technical faults and evidences of hasty composition. Mr. DeKay's best short poems show an earnestness of feeling and warmth of passion that scorn the more polished art of one less conscious of a high purpose.

In this chapter only native American writers are considered. Such a limitation, of course, should not exclude George Parsons Lathrop, who, by reason of his parentage and ancestry, may be justly considered a native. It is to be regretted that this writer has not followed more industriously his early taste for verse



writing. His "April Aria," "Rune of the Rain," "Helen at the Loom," and "Night in New York," show something far deeper than mere grace and fancy. Mr. Lathrop was not the first to find in the electric telegraph an inspiration for poetry, but on that subject nothing better has been written than his "Singing Wire," with its subtly poetic application.

The list of younger singers, born in the latter half of the century, is an extensive one. Charles Henry Luders (1858-1891), George E. Woodberry, Henry A. Beers, Arlo Bates, George E. Montgomery, Frank D. Sherman, Clinton Scollard, and others whose works in the magazines and in separate volumes have attracted attention, may be classed as truly representative singers of their day. They are too close to the present, however, to be fairly judged, and it is but just to assume that many of them have yet their best work to do.

It was the custom of our earlier critics to compare every female singer with the "Lesbian dame," just as in later years it has been the fashion among reviewers to draw a parallel between any "sweet songstress" and the unapproachable English poetess. If we would esteem our poets at their true worth, we must absolve ourselves completely from this shallow method of criticism. It is not necessary that we should lay claims to the possession of a modern Sappho or an "American Mrs. Browning," but we can honestly congratulate ourselves upon the existence of a chorus of true-voiced, tender-toned singers, who justly represent the feelings, thoughts, and aspirations of American womanhood. It is impossible within the limits of this chapter to do justice to each one of these, and it is therefore in no disparagement of the merits of

Mrs. Piatt, Mrs. Dorr, Mrs. Moulton, Miss Monroe, "Marian Douglas," Miss Perry, Mrs. Wilcox, Mrs. Lathrop, the Goodale sisters, and others East and West, that only four have been selected whose works may fairly be deemed typical of contemporary song.

When in 1870 Mrs. Helen Hunt Jackson, better known as "H. H." (1831-1885), a native of Massachusetts, published her first volume of "Verses," critics at once recognized the appearance of a writer of unusual intellectual force. Intellectualism of her sort was a rare quality among the female poets of America. Here was one in whom a strong spiritual personality was combined with a mind disciplined by thought, observation, and study. As poet, novelist, essayist, sketch writer, traveller, philanthropist, Mrs. Jackson stands in the front rank of our authors. But it is as a poet that she is to be remembered, — a poet of a newer idealism but not less devout than that of the "Dial" coterie. The problems of life and death, joy and grief, good and evil, and the conflicting emotions and experiences of existence had been revolved in her mind, and her meditations found fitting expression in verse, —

" Ah me, the subtle boundary between  
What pleases and what pains! "

This cry of a longing, doubting, questioning soul is the keynote of her song. Almost "afraid to fear, afraid to hope," she cherishes doubt with all its risks and pains, finding it a faith without which she should perish. Her poetry is the result of long thought, of introspection, of pondering upon questions of life. Her so-called "lyrics" are really studies, questionings, meditations, cast in lyrical form. Her idealism was carried into practical life. Our literature offers no

greater instance of self-renunciation than the sacrifice by Mrs. Jackson of her last years to the almost hopeless cause of the American Indian.

The work of Miss Emma Lazarus (1849-1887), of New York, was the kind that lasts. Her early work, "Admetus," was dedicated to Mr. Emerson, whose influence pervaded her whole literary life. In 1876 she visited Concord and formed or renewed her acquaintance with Mr. Emerson and his neighbors. At Emerson's death one of the strongest tributes to his memory came from this gentle singer, who addressed him as "Master and Father." But there is nothing of imitation in the fair disciple, though she resembled her master in her faith in humanity and loyalty to conscience as above conventionalism.

It was about 1882, according to her biographer, that the stories of the wrongs to which her race was being subjected in Europe aroused her indignation. For the rest of her life she waged with her pen an almost ceaseless warfare. Refined, gentle, and reserved almost to shyness, this daughter of wealth and fashion could visit without compunction the retreats of the poor and squalid, helping and encouraging the needy, pleading with the world for their condition, living a life that was a greater poem than anything that she wrote. In the outcast, the persecuted of her people, she saw only the members of that wondrous race that in the twilight dawn of recorded history produced its poets, prophets, and warriors, that has preserved its ancestral traditions through the ages, and still makes itself felt through all the shifting changes of modern life. From its heroic past she anticipated an heroic future, and sought in every way to elevate those who had become degraded through years of suffering. In-

stead of such work as "The Spagnoletto" (1876), an Italian drama of the seventeenth century with little to recommend it, she gave us "The Dance to Death" (1882), an historical tragedy, based upon the persecutions of the Jews during the fourteenth century. This is one of the very few tragedies which our generation in America can transmit to posterity with some sense of pride. Invention, imagination, a dramatic movement from beginning to end, and a sense of the beautiful and the tragic, characterize this remarkable work. Miss Lazarus proudly named her last volume "Songs of a Semite" (1882). It was in this book that she waved aloft "The banner of the Jew," and pleading not for mercy but for justice, gave us her most earnest and heartfelt songs.

It is with something like relief that we turn from the tense, spiritualized atmosphere of these two singers to the invigorating out-door lyrics of Mrs. Celia (Leighton) Thaxter (1835-1894). No woman has ever sung more lovingly of the sea. Her best songs recall the ocean-scented breezes, the sounds of flapping sails, the dip of oars, the "voices on the gale," and seem to echo—

"The sad caressing murmur of the wave  
That breaks in tender music on the shore."

To her, nature is divine, but tender, joyous, and inspiring. Mrs. Thaxter was born in Aldrich's "old town by the sea," and from earliest childhood had spent many years at the Isles of Shoals, which she so pleasantly described in prose. A susceptible, poetic mind, maturing amid such surroundings, could not fail to absorb the poetry and romance about her. Her father was keeper of a lighthouse, and the courageous young girl entered heart and soul into the spirit of

the scene. One of the joys of her childhood was to light the lighthouse lamp. "That was indeed a pleasure," she writes. "So little a creature as I might do that for the great world." The Isles of Shoals were not unknown in literature before she began to write, but it was reserved for her to interpret the beauty of the place in its true spirit. Her first book of "Poems" was published in 1874, and was followed by several other volumes, all in the same fresh, unhackneyed style that has come to be associated with her name. That she was possessed of a vigorous descriptive power, her "Cruise of the Mystery," a legend of a phantom slave-ship, abundantly shows. But through all her strong, graphic lines runs a woman's faith and tenderness. "The Sandpiper" has justly been described by Mr. Burroughs as a feminine poem, as Bryant's "Water-fowl" is "characteristically a man's."

"We cannot go by Robin Herrick's garden, with its fantastic parterres, without begging a holiday souvenir," says Miss Edith M. Thomas in one of her pleasant prose essays. It cannot be charged that Miss Thomas has begged or borrowed from Herrick or any other of the early English lyrists, but beyond any of her contemporaries she has succeeded in infusing into her verse the spirit of the Elizabethan singers. We have had plenty of poets and versifiers who have studied and sought to imitate the freshness, quaintness, and spontaneity of the lyric poets of that wondrous age, but none who may claim so closely a natural kinship. Nature is this poet's "great griefless friend," to whom she turns for guidance and consolation. The revival of classic myths in her lyrics seems as natural and unforced as in Herrick's verse. Elves, nymphs, and naiads sport through her poems without a suspicion of

incongruity, but as if of right belonging there. Richness of thought, depth of sentiment, and strength of imagination are the most obvious traits of this poet.

It was a noble inspiration which led to the adoption of a symbol of death as one of light and hope. The work entitled "The Inverted Torch" is an earnest, impassioned threnody, consisting of a series of sonnets and lyrics. Frequently there are passages rising to the heights of genuine sublimity. In majestic numbers the poem moves to its close, when the full meaning appears:

"Threading a darksome passage all alone,  
The taper's flame, by envious current blown,  
Crouched low and eddied round as in affright,  
So challenged by the vast and hostile night,  
Then down I held the taper; — swift and fain  
Up climbed the lovely flower of light again!

"Thou kindler of the spark of life divine,  
Be henceforth the Inverted Torch a sign  
That, though the flame beloved thou dost depress,  
Thou wilt not speed it into nothingness;  
But out of nether gloom wilt reinspire,  
And homeward lift the keen empyreal fire!"

Miss Thomas is the youngest writer from whose verse we have taken the liberty of quoting in these pages. It seems eminently appropriate that the procession that has passed in review before us, beginning at the source of American civilization, while Elizabeth was still upon the throne, should be brought to a close by a singer whose strains so fitly recall the Elizabethan age, the golden period of English song.

It is nearly three centuries since English became the dominant language in what is now the United States. The history of the English-speaking race therein is a

record of the evolution of modern democracy. Have American literature and American democracy developed in corresponding degrees? I do not see how anyone who has given each an impartial study can answer in the negative. Our literature, but more especially poetry, reflects the national life, character, and experience as completely as do our social customs or our material inventions. Americans have been charged with sentimentalism in devotion to ideals. To sustain those ideals they have contributed their hearts' best blood, and in defence of those ideals philanthropists have labored, orators have pleaded, and poets have sung. These pages have been written in vain, if the reader has been unable to trace therein the course of American development, the crude, provincial life as reflected in the imitative verse of the colonial years, the strugglings after nationalism in that of the germinative period, the aspirations toward the beautiful and the ideal in that of the formative era, the self-reliant, vigorous growth in the literary product of the middle years of the century, and the culture and polish of the present in the elaborately finished work of contemporary writers. Almost every phase of our national progress and our national trials where a great ethical principle is involved may be found echoed in the current verse of each period. There is one notable exception, and that is the one most obvious to-day. It is idle to ignore the social revolution which, for better or worse, we are now undergoing, — the marked tendency, as manifested in recent legislation, toward social democracy or "social evolution." Unless all signs fail, this is something more than a transitory ebullition. As yet this latter day socialism has found no adequate American singers like those of the anti-

slavery contest. The impress of the socialistic spirit is far more marked in current English verse than in our own. Even Whitman, with all his aggressiveness, shrank from the contemplation of it. In spite of this ultra-democratic poet's fondness for "powerful uneducated persons," the labor agitator was wearisome to him, and he could not put himself in touch with the methods of labor-reformers.<sup>1</sup> Whittier's "Songs of Labor" were adapted to conditions of half a century ago, before the present sharply defined class distinctions had developed as a result of unions and trusts. The social evolutionist is having abundance to say in current oratory, politics, essays, and even in novels, but is conspicuously absent from the highest realms of literature. As yet no latter-day Elliott or Whittier has been found to champion the new cause. Is this because our modern poets fail to read aright the signs of the times, or is it because these reforms fail to appeal to the deepest sentiments of our nature?

<sup>1</sup> See Sketch by Sidney H. Morse, "In re Whitman," p. 379.



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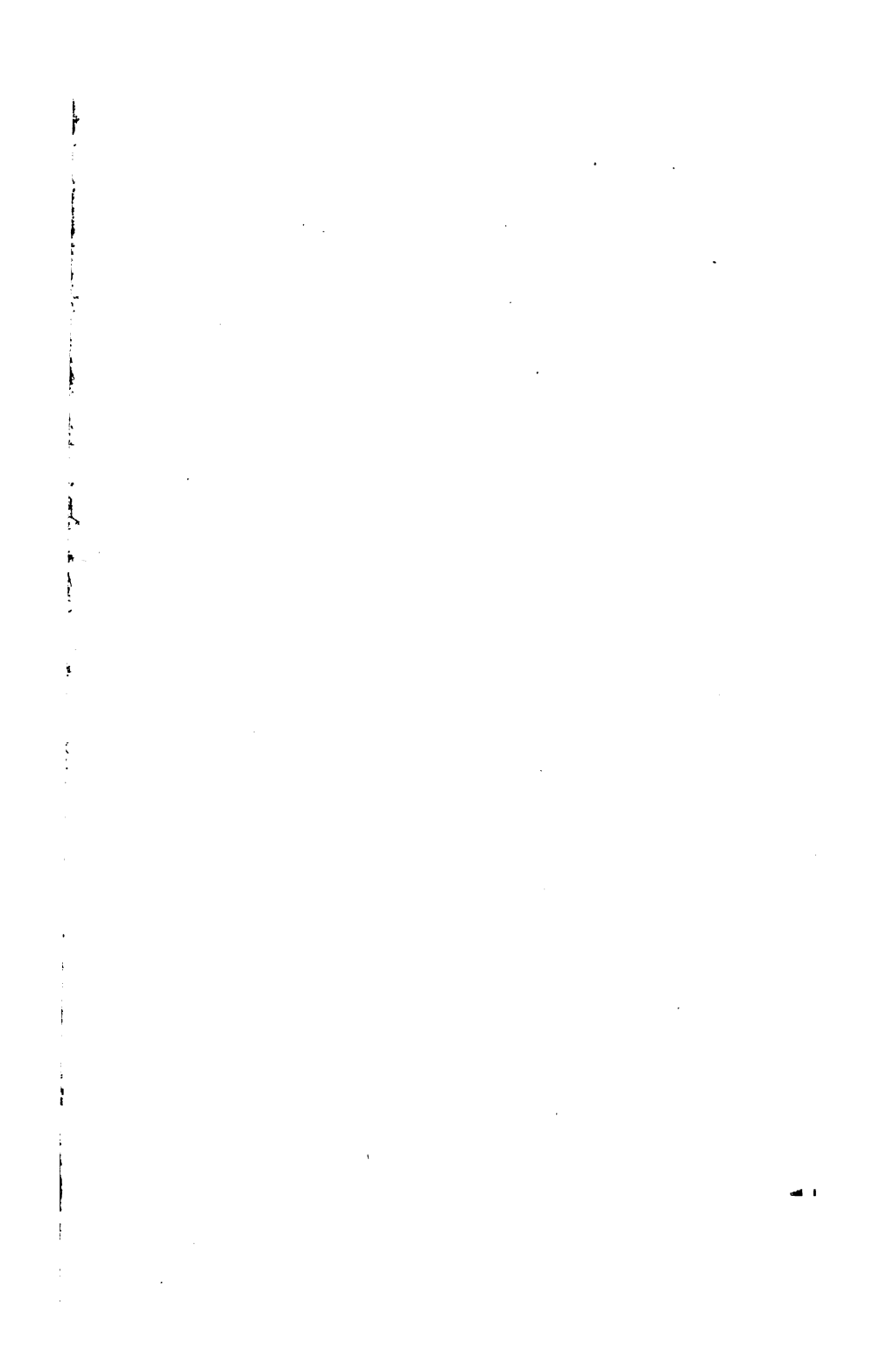
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